OUTCASTS IN BEULAH LAND

HELTON

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OUTCASTS IN BEULAH LAND

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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To
ANNE HELTON

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Æsthetic Symbols	3
Youth	6
The Career of Callie Burke	8
Mazie	12
The Girl with Yellow Eyes	16
Glimpses	26
Sappho in Southwark	27
In Passing	29
Ten Minutes at Tea Time	30
On the Fire Escape	38
Busy	42
Bitters	43
In December	46
At the Doorway	47
Illusion	49
Shirtwaists	53
In the Day's Work	55
Aunt Josie's Chatty Letter	57
Steeplechase	59
Three Smiles on Vine Street	62
Her Gift	68
Song	73
The American	74
The Immoral Monologue of Mortal Ignorance	76

PAGE

To a Sleeping Child 79
In the Desert 80
Propriety 83
Ghosts 84
The Chatterbox Smell 85
Creole Kate 87
Opal 92
An Old Story 96
Pot Pourri on a Cat Hospital Ambulance . . 100
Thursday Evening 104
A Turn of Twine 113
Outcasts in Beulah Land 125

OUTCASTS IN BEULAH LAND

ÆSTHETIC SYMBOLS

The ten-cent crowd ebbed in and out
Across the narrow space,
And I was almost past her, when
I saw the woman's face:

Against the stairway bars she leaned,
Beside the flower stand;
An old black bonnet on her head,
A cream cone in each hand:

I guessed this moment had been won
By careful schemes long laid,
I guessed that she had worked from dawn
Till all the beds were made,
Thrilled with a great gray passion for
Our holiday parade:

Alone, amid the crowd, she stood,
Poor as the poorest there;
A shoddy sacque of rusty black
The best that she could wear;
A bonnet trimmed with carpet plush
Upon her scant white hair:
But there was rapture in her face

I never saw in such a place,
Nor often anywhere.

Against those stairway bars she leaned,
Beside the flower stand;
A chocolate ice cream cone, she held
In each old wrinkled hand.

Her eyes were raised in calm content
Above the jamming crowd,
And now and then she paused to munch
The oozing bit of five-cent lunch
Her penury allowed:

Where popcorn balls and cheap perfumes
Give texture to the air,
While yonder frantic Jewess cries,
"We sell these cheap to advertise
And guarantee they'll wear"—

"Gold wire rings," one siren sings,
"Are only ten apiece."
"This cleaning fluid will remove
Blood stains or tar or grease!"
But no Bill Sykes a bargain strikes—
And so the barkings cease.

The corn cure man holds high aloft
Five dirty plaster toes—
"If you'll just wait, I'll demonstrate!"
But off milady goes.

Banana Sundaes ten a plate,
  And heel taps for your feet—
Good taste forbids cheap coffin lids,
  Or life were here complete.

But clear above the salesgirls' din
  Weird music shrilled along,
Where Little Records (two for ten)
  Raised high their searching song:

First Dixie, then Joe Turner's Blues,
  The Songs of Yesterday,
When Yankee Doodle Learns to Parlez
  Vous Français.

The ten-cent crowd ebbed in and out
  Across the narrow space,
And I was almost past her when
  I saw her mystic face . . .

The Records shrilled their scratchy tunes;
  Her second cone was gone;
But still, against the stairway rail
  The old wife lingered on:

Her worn eyes raised in ecstasy,
  She pressed those wooden bars:
No Blessed Damozel was she,
And wore no crown that I could see,—
  I could not count her stars.

YOUTH

Before the bake shop, staring in,
A child stood, freckled, frail and thin,
Mousing the cold pane every way
Through fox-like eyes of June-sky gray.
I followed her about the town
To see what she might wish to do
While the rain fell and wet her through.

First, in an ash can delving down,
She drew a bit of china up
And stood there with a gathering frown
Fitting the fragments of the cup,
Building the blue shape, bit by bit;
Then smiling heaved them back again
And dragged a whiskey bottle out
To sniff the broken neck of it.

Out of a box a Christmas chain
Of pale green paper and bright red
She caught, to drape her draggled head
And ornament her dripping clothes.
Then wrapped some bonnet wire about
A can, and swung it through the rain.

So skipping down the curb she goes
With gaping shoes and licoriced face,
In wild, free, boyish strides whose grace
Has little need of song or wing—
A regnant, chainless, elfin thing.

Of all earth's creatures, she alone,
At that dull hour, seemed wholly free:
Plucking the beard of Destiny,
A Richard Burton to the bone.
And when she stopped, her skirts to wring,
I swear, I heard the creature sing
Some wild ecstatic drunkard's strain
That breathed defiance to the rain.

THE CAREER OF CALLIE BURKE

At fourteen, little Callie Burke
  Was put at washing by her mother,
Who'd had nine children in ten years,
And freely voiced her frequent fears
  That every June would bring another.

Callie had notions—needed breaking:
  Tried to keep back a dime a day;
Saved a few cents, then by and by,
What with cheap novels on the sly,
  Packed up one night and ran away.

Now, reader, I must disappoint
  Your fond, but callous expectation,
That ethnic health or suicide,
Or Gay White Ways, or carnal pride,
  Explain poor Callie's brief vacation.

She ran away—due west twelve miles,
  This poor dumb groping child, who felt
No need for clothes, nor food, nor soap,
But packed in her gray telescope
  A pistol and a cartridge belt.

They found her camping by the road;
  Brought her back home and called a preacher
Who said, " The worldly books she reads
Done this. Now it's God's word she needs.
If that fails let a birch rod teach her."

At nineteen she was tamed and wed:
  Then in due time her son was born:
To her low door, but few joys came;
Year end to year end was the same:
  Night upon night and morn on morn.

At thirty-four her bloom was gone—
  Worn off by chafing at the chains
Of tasks laid on and dreams withstood
In labor's loveless matronhood;
  And scarce their memory remains.

When she was forty-three her son
  Went west, as she had tried to do,
But soon his voice and face grew dim:
She never had a word from him;
  And what he did, she never knew.

Nine years, and Callie's old man died:
  The widow proved a modest mourner.
She packed her goods up in a crate,
Slammed the old garden's prison gate
  And rented at the Main Street corner.

There at the window, five years through,
  Watching men's faces as they passed,
She tried to share their smiles and fears,
And so obliterate the years
  To win her touch of youth at last:

There, as men came and went, she wondered
  To what strange paths their fates were bound;
She saw the road's dust on their feet;
To her old eyes, that dust was sweet,
  For every road was holy ground.

So she sat there and drank life in
  Deep to its dregs, that cup denied:
Yet found it bitter to her tongue:
Dreams are not all of being young,
  Nor any wedding guest, the bride.

One evening, as she watched, there passed
  A youth and maid, fine-eyed, fair-spoken:
They met, they smiled, and both grew gay:
Then turning saw her sharp and gray
  Peeping. They fled. The charm was broken. . . .

Next day nor next she was not there;
  With fevered fingers—ah, so late
She twisted up her ashen hair
And bade farewell to her worn chair:
  Shame had unlocked her door of fate.

For life began in Callie Burke
  At late November's sixty-three:
" Watching is over now! I'll wear
That road dust on my own gray hair.
  I'll look no more," she cried, " I'll be!

" I'll not be gazing out again,
  But meeting lovers, as I share
In my old heart their thrill, their pain,
Shall no more mind me than the rain,
  Nor more regard me than the air.

" They'll say—' Old mother over there
  She tastes the sun and dust, as we.
No garden pales nor sheltered pane
Hide her old wrinkles from the rain!
  We love her for it! '—might that be."

So Callie Burke, at sixty-three
  Packed her old telescope again,
And down the county highway went
In Faith's elected banishment,
  To taste the dust and drink the rain.

The spiders spin across the pane;
  Year upon year the dead leaves fall:
Still vacant is that old worn chair:
On some wide highway—God knows where—
  Magellan folds a Paisley shawl.

MAZIE

Lonely-eyed Mazie sat
In the old Automat,
Dreaming, ah, dreaming a
Dream of some golden day:
Dreaming, ah, dreaming
Strange dreams never told
By the shy hidden-hearted
Dear ladies of old.

There in the Automat
Lonely-eyed Mazie sat:
With but a dime to spend
At the day's end; she did
As her need bade her do—
Licked off that fleck of stew
From her brass finger ring—
Then licked her fingers too. . . .
Wantonly lingering;

Lingering—dreaming there,
Fond visions far too fair
For this old burnt out star
Whereon she toils awhile
Waiting her chance to smile:

Muddle-haired Mazie
In the old rose hood,
Trying as hard as she
Could—with the gifts she had,
To seem both wise and bad:
Mazie who'd always seen
Soldier and slim marine,
Sailor and flyer,
Coolly pass by her—
Never a stare deigned,
Not a frown even gained:
As if she were
An invisible girl, they stared
Through her—around her—

Nobody found her.

Gentle-eyed Mazie who
Wanted a hero too.

But at the last, I saw
Nature assert the sway
Of her relentless law:
Mazie's shy star arose
In new-caught glory:
Day's end and stars and tide,
Love for the weary-eyed,
These the grave gods supplied
To her mild story.

Eating his ham and eggs
Over a cup of tea,
Scanning the ladies' legs
Under the tables; he
Sidled across to her
Grimy and grimly;
Sidled across, as though
He were a pirate, out
Of Treasure Island, who
Had a new lay in mind
For wholesale murder: grim
Wasn't the name for him:
Growled out a greeting.

That was their meeting;
Her part all wonder
At gold band and blue.
His part? I puzzled, till
Somehow—God knows—
The hidden child
Rose from his war-beaten
Eyes, and he smiled. . . .

The sunlight came over him.

Knowing the ways of men
I sipped my tea again. . . .
Must I tell what they said
Town born and water bred?
Ah, no. The moment

Of wonder that rose,
Somehow must close
After a while,
In fate's own style—
Strindberg or Shaw.
God made the law;
I choose to smile
Rather than scowl:
You in your cowl
Dreading a wrong—
Pick your own way!
This is your day—

But this is my song.

THE GIRL WITH YELLOW EYES

A MILL doll passed a store boy on the street.
When he looked down and caught her glance, he saw
A smiling girlish face with strange hot eyes,
Brown yellow like a beast's eyes mad to gnaw. . .

The lids closed; the lithe body seemed to sway
Toward him a little; then the girl was gone,
Leaving a cold-hot puzzling memory
For this slow, steady lad to ponder on:

All the beast's beauty flamed with dreadful joys,
Lusts primitive and cruel and intense,
Glared at him, as through undergrowths of time,
Set in that face of child-like innocence.

A dog brushed by; the boy walked after it
Along his way; night came; the streets grew dim;
And for a while the store boy dwelt with dreams,
Those hungry leopard eyes still haunting him. . . .

It would have been scarce human had he not
Waited the next night at the selfsame place:

Beyond the railroad tracks on Willow Street.
"At least," he thought, "she has no street girl's face."

The whistle blew, and out the women came
In whispering pairs and babbling companies,
Still spruce, for all their nine hours' toiling. With them,
But quite alone, the girl with yellow eyes.

As she came by him and looked up again,
The boy, whose heart misgave him at the last,
Saw her eyes widen: felt them cling to him.
He flushed and faltered. The girl hastened past.

Then summoning what crumbs of wit remained
The store boy spilled some papers from his arm
Against her feet. She tripped. He reached and caught her—
A moment held her fingers, moist and warm.

She stopped. Then while the others giggled past
They fumbled at the papers. He met her eye:
"This is sure good of you, Kid!" "Keep the change!
You are one clumsy beef all right—good-by!"

"Aw, wait a mo," he called. "I'm going your way."

"Where's that?" the girl frowned. "Well, sis,
can't you see
That your way's mine too, now: I want to talk to
you."
"I haven't ate yet." "Come on and eat with
me!"

She shook her head, looked up, then said, "All
right.
I've got to fix up first, though." "Where's your
shack?"
The girl's head drooped. "I haven't got one now.
I hang out at Miss Kinsey's,—fourth floor back."

"Wouldn't you like me for a friend?" he ventured.
"I guess we're both alone; my folks are dead."
"I haven't any friends. I don't like women,
And fellows are too tough round here," she said.

He looked down at her. Seen so close at hand
Those yellow eyes seemed but a muddy brown;
And there was little music in her voice,
And little beauty in her tattered gown.

Yet he went on, to see the venture through.
She took her latch key out, and said, "Come in,
They wouldn't like it, if you stood outside,—
This wind is sharp now, and your coat seems
thin."

So he went in, half trembling, much in doubt,
And peered around. There was no parlor door.
But as she led him up the creaking stairs
A voice shrilled sharply, from the second floor:

"Who's there?" "It's Mazie," came the girl's quick answer.—
"If I say you're my friend she'll send you back.
What's your name?" "John." "Who's that you're talking to there—
Some fellow with you?" "No—my brother Jack.

"That's old Miss Kinsey," Mazie whispered faintly,
"She's never had girl boarders here before."
She pressed his arm and the lad shivered slightly,
But stole beside her past the bathroom door.

"You go ahead, I'll show her where she gets off!
The end of the hall on the fourth floor. Here's my key."
"So you're a-taking some man up to your room, hah?"
"There ain't no parlor here that I can see."

The voices clashed. A door slammed—dark and silence.
Up the dim creaking stair he groped along:

Past doorways fringed with light, past muffled voices,
And once the faint croon of a cradle song.

Then the last flight; a fumble at the door knob,
A squeaking lock, a musty tumbled room,
A patch of light, a tree's lace on the sunset,
And huddled chimneys smoking in the gloom.

The boy pulled down the window shade, then lighted
The little gas lamp, in whose mellow gleam
Table and bed and chairs and clothes and wall space
Seemed broken patterns in some madman's dream.

The room was like a tropic wilderness,
Festooned with dried hydrangeas, pampas grass,
Cat tails and peacock feathers. The pinewood mantel
Was fringed with broken bits of colored glass.

There in the corner lay a baby's mitten,
A little vagrant patch of vivid red.
A few big books were piled up at the window,
Balzac's Droll Tales lay open on the bed.

There by the lamp, Dante with Doré pictures,—
Old, broken-backed, dog-eared, and roughly fingered,

And Johnson's Dictionary with cracked binding
Where the faint odor of pressed flowers still lingered.

Her clothes were piled upon the only chair:
Ragged blue silks of Eve's poor heedless daughter,
Faintly perfumed: the floor was strewn with string.
The washbowl, left brim full of soapy water. . . .

He had dumped out the suds and washed his face,
And stood there groping for a towel, when she
Opened the door and came in, flushed and angry,
To sink upon her bed, right wearily.

"Use anything you see! I'm short on towels.
I'm kind of worn out talking to that old cat."
"It's quarter of seven," he cried, "come on!" "I'll hurry;
I've only got to change my shoes and hat."

So while he dried his hands on the lace curtain,
The girl changed her worn shoes and stockings too;
And the boy, looking down, from near the window,
Saw her slim legs stretched out, twin curves of blue.

For she sat there as artless as a kitten,
Fixing the clasps on her silk stocking tops:

The boy's pulse leaped; he flushed with sudden fever,
The sweat came on his brow in little drops.

He moved round toward the bed. Mazie looked at him
With startled eyes, that as the boy drew near
Seemed to grow yellow again, the tigress yellow.
On the lad's face his purpose was quite clear.

The girl's hand sought her bodice. She scarcely moved then,
But the eyes followed him—the eyes alone
Stirred and had life. Her white half-open bosom
Seemed frozen to a shape of polished stone.

But when the outstretched hand there touched her shoulder
She woke, as a couched serpent at the spring;
Her arm flashed from her breast. In the tense fingers
A long keen Barlow blade rose glittering.

He plucked his arm back, but she drew the blood
With a deep vicious slash along his wrist.
"Why, you blamed little cat! You brought me here!"
John's face grew grim. He clenched the sound left fist.

"You think I'll stand for this?" the store boy
blustered.
"I'd like to smash your face, you South Street
rat."
The girl paled—his cut hand was wet and dripping.
"What put you up to pull a trick like that?"

Mazie stared at the wound with startled eyes.
She hardly heard him. "Quick, come here!"
she said.
"Not much I won't. I've had enough." "Please!
Please—come!"
"First throw that damned pig-sticker off the
bed!"

She tossed the penknife to his feet. Her face
seemed
Paler than that white underskirt she tore.
She bandaged up his wound with deft cold fingers.
The boy backed off, but lingered at the door:

Then said, "So long!" No answer. "You're
one wild cat.
I've learned a bit today." He turned the knob,
Stepped out into the hall and stumbled down it.
From her closed door stole one faint muffled sob.

So while his hurt hand sought the bannister
John turned and listened: her voice moaned,
"This one too—

I've never had one friend could be a true friend;
Somehow, poor fool I am, his eyes seemed true.

"The first day even—tonight I felt I knew him,
That I could have some joy here after all—
Some chap that didn't only want my body.
He stood there blushing at me, clean and tall,

"Friendly and strong, not stiff as women are,
But—well, his heart lied like his face, I guess;
There's nothing true—that's all my web of dreams.
Lust is man's only cure for loneliness."

The boy's face, as he listened, burned with shame:
And her low words cut deep as knives could do.
Yet for a moment hot resentment followed:
"Half of the blame," he thought, "lies right with you."

Then a strange sound. John scrambled back, burst open
The door and stood there white, in voiceless dread—
With her right hand like his, slashed deep, and bleeding,
The girl lay panting on her tumbled bed.

He bound her wrist up, growling like a brother,
Stuck her hat on, helped lace her shoes, then cried:

"Hurry, Kid, have a heart! I'm nearly famished.
We ain't proud—put the whitewash on outside."

So they went out and ate a bit of dinner:
Talked, quarreled, fought, made up, almost like kin.
Then went to see a thriller at the movies,
And laughed home to the door, where she went in:

Where she went in and waved a hand in parting,
Then sprang up those steep stairs with laughing feet;
While the young man strode off, his heartbeats quickened,
Passing those railroad tracks on Willow Street.

. . . . .

All this I premise as the various reason
Why, last night, as I sat in Green's to dine,
Two right hands raised bore each a bloody bandage
As they were lifted, pledging their cheap wine;

Why, on the girl's cheeks, there were unwashed tear stains;
Why the lad scowled, and lorded brother-wise;
Why there was love, and glory of thanksgiving
Within a little mill doll's yellow eyes.

GLIMPSES

Last night, as through the crowd on Market Street
A new-made soldier proudly swung along,
Guiding that gray-eyed wonder called his girl,
Whose face turned up to him in silent song:

I marked, above those gay young hearts atune,
The unimportant beauty of the moon.

SAPPHO IN SOUTHWARK

Under the street lamps in the rain
Old Martie rambled by;
Sealskin and lace and silver chain,
Her thick silks swishing shamelessly.
The spring was in her veins that night:
She palpitated with delight.
Under her ample brassiere
Beat an old heart aloof from care.

Each corner was a stage whereon
Strode comedy of days long gone:
"Here that wise laughing rube I met,
Yonder that hairy-chested Dane
With the huge gift of epithet"—
So mused she, through the April rain.

The city's silence and its stir
Were like a cup of dreams to her.
Each shuttered house that she passed by
Held an authentic mystery;
The drooping young moon lured from flight
By all this stir and human coil,
The green and fading sky for foil,

And the intrinsic dirt, that living
Grinds from the path it travels on;
Man's ugliness, past man's forgiving,
These things she watched from dawn to dawn:
Or toward the drifting clouds she'd look
With face turned up that the rain might flee
Into her eyes deliciously,
(Eyes love-worn do grow light weary
However young their heart would be.)

A clattering dray went thumping by
And turned the corner. Then there fell
From a dim dormer window, high
Upon a dark and vacant wall,
A breath of song—a vagrant call
Of human passion. On the shade
A young girl's shadow, lithe and tall.
"I wonder if she's still a maid,"
Thought Martie, as she trapesed along—
Eyes upward—ears intent on song.

IN PASSING

Through the dim window, I could see
The little room—a sordid square
Of helter-skelter penury:
Piano, whatnot, splintered chair:

It is so small a room that I
Seemed almost at the woman's side:
Galled jade—too fat for vanity,
And far too frankly old for pride.

Her greasy apron round her waist;
The dish cloth by her on the chair:
As though, in some wild headlong haste,
She had come in and settled there:

Grimly she bends her back and tries
To stab the keys, with heavy hand;
A child's first finger exercise
Before her on the music stand.

TEN MINUTES AT TEA TIME

I'd eat my bowl of suey,
  I'd drunk my pot of tea,
When that snow bird in the corner
  Turns his wax face towards me—
I never saw a man who had
  Such heavy eyes as he.

But at last he heaves their lids up
  And stares into my face.
Says he, "Does Richmond Rosie
  Victual in this here place?"

Now I was working problems:
  One injun cent and three
Jits and one old lead quarter
  Fills up my treasury—
And I wondered what kind of a bobtail
  My next day's dinner'd be.

So I answers him, "Richmond Rosie,
  For all I knows or cares,
Kin eat her fancy victuals
  On Mrs. Hell's back stairs."

The pale lad's eye went glassy,
  He kind o' thinned at the lip,
And I saw his long white fingers
  Amble around to his hip:

Jest then the door squeals open
  And a couple o' swells blows in:
A dame with a map like an angel
  And a guy with a three-roll chin,
Who remarks: " Back home in Kansas
  We don't like our women thin."

Then the lad in the corner shudders
  And hurries his eyes away—
Stares out through the half-shut window
  Into the fading day:

His body shook with an ague
  That wasn't the evening air,
And his long white fingers twisted
  Like snakes round the bent wood
    chair. . . .

Off in the further corner
  Of the old chink's dining-room,
The girl with her guy from Kansas
  Sat in the thickening gloom:

He talked of curves and kisses;
  She hinted satins and gold,

And food and lodging and shelter,
  And ease from the rain and the cold.

So they sat at the grease-stained table
  And played with their food awhile:
The dry goods drummer from Kansas
  Eating in barnyard style:
The lovely lady smiling
  A fixed commercial smile.

Till Yah Fu entered, suavely,
  And lighted the gas, whose flame
Showed all the old Canton pictures,
  Each in its teakwood frame,—
Showed all the grease on the tables,
  But never a hint of shame

On that lovely pale girl in a golden
  Gown with a rose here and there
Worked over it—in that winsome
  Wren with long midnight hair:
In that golden glorious woman
  Under her sky dark hair,

Who sat and listened in silence,
  Who dreamed till the Kum Quats came—
While the rube reached over and fondled
  Her fingers and guessed at her name.
(In the niche by the half-shut window
  Two eyes leered forth red as flame.)

Dad Time lays by his whetstone,
  Fate smiles and fingers her shears;
And the gods of Gin and Dry Goods
  Raises their mugs of tears;

But that couple still loafed at their table
  Under the teakwood frame—
Till the guy from the west of Kansas
  Stumbled at last on her name;

And bawled it out till the echoes
  Stirred the old cobwebs there;
Then reached his red hands out to pet her,
  But muddled her midnight hair.
(Back by the half-shut window
  I heard the sharp scrape of a chair:
And a voice cried out, "I stood all things
  But this thing's one more than I'll bear.")

Then the dope at the alcove table
  Lurched out and reached toward his hip.
The wonderful golden lady
  Showed all her workmanship,
For she sat like a piece of marble
  Smeared red on the cheeks and the lip—

"You poor dope! Get back to Blockley!"
  "I'll git in due time," says he,
"But the wagon that hauls me, Rosie,
  Hauls a couple of stiffs with me.

"I stood for you being a flapper,
But bleedin' Judas!" says he,
"There's one thing, blast my eyeballs!
I didn't think you'd be."

Then he looks at the dark-haired lady
And raises his upper lip,
But I saw those long white fingers
Pull at the gun on his hip:

And he fetches her out and lifts her,
(I set like a man in a dream)
While I hears the wonderful lady
Shrill out in a piercing scream:
"Oh, Jimmy, don't shoot, boy! Don't kill me!
I ain't near bad as I seem."
But he squints down the long black barrel
And his eye holds a steel-gray gleam:

Then the dry goods drummer from Kansas,
Who'd sat like a kid at a play,
Turns as green as an old dead sunfish
That's laid on the beach all day,
And his heavy jowls grew flabby,
And his lips and his nose went gray.

But he squints toward the girl in the golden
Gown, with a rose here and there

Worked over it—toward that marble
Jane with long midnight hair,
And I saw his old fat lips working
And thought that they shaped a prayer;
Then I heard the thing he was saying:
"Old girl! By the Lord but you're fair."

The tall dope steadies his pistol.
"I counts just three," he said,
"And you and your old fat fellow—
You, in your shame-bought yellow,
Takes your count on the matting
And swallows your dose of lead."

"One! Two!" he sings, and his fingers
Stiffens around the gun:
"Three!" he snaps. "Good-by, Rosie!
You've had your last squint at the sun.
"Three!" he snaps, and he pulls her:
There was a wild deed done:

For that dry goods drummer from Kansas
Kicks back on the woman's chair,
And she tumbles down in the corner
And lies like a meal sack there.

"Three!" he snaps, and he pulls her,
But the girl had slid from her place,
And the dry goods drummer from Kansas
Takes the cold lead in his face.

I reaches for my persuader,
And bunching my nerves a bit
I railroads that dope to the matting—
'Twas a good clean crack I hit:
Then that gold girl ups from the corner,
And I whispers, "Kid—make your git!"

But before she kilts up her hangings
And glides like a ghost to the door,
She stoops a moment, so help me,
To that old fat face on the floor:

"You done a thing this evening
I won't forget," says she,
"Till there ain't no stars in Heaven
And no waves on the sea,—
Till there ain't no rain nor thunder,
And no man smiles on me!"

Then down her cheeks' pale marble
Two great round teardrops roll—
So I knowed that the guy from Kansas
Had stirred the lady's soul—
That the lucky old stiff from Kansas
Had roused the woman's soul.

"It's one lad out of a million,"
The pretty lady said:
As down the Chink's old stairway
She lifted her skirts and fled:

Left us alone to the silence—
  Me and the dope and the dead. . . .

(There's many a Joan of Arc, I say,
  Limping in shabby twill;
There's many a Walter Raleigh
  Locked up in Cherry Hill;

The Merriwells I've knowed and seen
  Doing the deeds worth while
Was, often as not, folk God forgot
  To finish in Broadway style—
Was often cursed with a blistering thirst
  Or damned by a liberal smile.)

That dope cashed in on the wagon:
  I done my space in the pen;
There's never a guy like that fat guy
  Has come in my world again,
And never a girl like that gold girl
  To bite at the hearts of men.

ON THE FIRE ESCAPE

(Come in here, Mammy, come in!
Air ye got the frenzies agin?
The rain's a-peltin' there about
And it's cruel cold, both in and out:
Come in now, Mammy! Come in!)

I cannot come in tonight!
When the wind keens up from the south
The rain stoops over and holds me here
And youth blows into my mouth.

(It's only the flappin' o' clothes on your line,
And the telephone wires that keen:
Come in! We've a chop in the pan tonight—
It's little o' meat you've seen.)

I've a thrill of the breath of the mountains:
I kin smell old Savage's pines;
I kin hear the Yankees choppin'
At the lead in Jenny's mines;
I kin hark the wildcats yowlin'
I kin smell the forest floor,
An' the gift o' sight lies on my eyes:
I see my Rob once more—
Dark Robbie, your pa, once more.

(Oh, Mammy, ah, Mammy—come in!
You are deadin' yourself at this gait.
It's the rattle and rip and the din
Of the town that you've caged us in,
That's turning your wit to the wall.
There's a chop in the pan—come, Mammy!
Come in, where you stand in the rain!)

Come in to the murk and the smother?
I dreamt I was young again:
Fetchin' the mast from the mountains
Through hemlock clearings or pine,
Or fillin' my calico apron
With berries for elderbush wine.

(Come in now, Mammy! Come in!
Sure, this sleet will bite to your bones.)

It's many a night I've braved the snow,
And there's many a winter mile to go
Ere my legs lie under the stones.
'Twas in a blizz o' rain like this
He came from the hills to me—
A dark lean lad with a linen shirt
All mucked and gaumed with the quarry
dirt—
But a blazin' eye had he:
And it was three days o' heaven I knew,
While he bided there with me.

Then he opened the door in a rain like this,
And he kissed farewell on my mouth:
"Some man's blood's aimin' to spill for you—
It mought be one, and it mought be two."
He reined his mare round the poplar there
An' set his face to the south.

For I was tokened to Dilsey Kooms
Since he was a knee-high lad,
But the man who'd got the soul o' me
Was Robbie, your dark-eyed dad.
He said, "I'll come, God give me sight,
If ever I git free to come."
I didn't even pray that night,
But lay like all my soul was numb.
And I hain't seen his face since then—
Ten years and ten and double ten:
But when the winter south winds blow—
It's Robbie's voice I hear,
Callin' them words o' long ago
Silver sweet and clear:
He says, "Will you mind me, gray-eyed lass,
When twoscore heavy years go by?"
And I answered, "Yes, I will."
Robbie minds my answer still:
"Let a hundred hundred pass,
And this heart won't change," said I.

(Come in now, Mammy, come in!
It's the town has muddled your wit;
With the cold bleak faces and smirkin' eyes
And ice in the heart of it.)

Had the rocks and the pines o' the hills
A kinder heartin' for me?
I loved them, but they had not one tear
For all that man's eyes may gie—
When my Robbie lay in the mountain clay,
In that glade where my bed must be.

Mind, lad, where my bed must be.

BUSY

The maiden aunt stood watching in the doorway:
Nervously she stroked her white gloves on;
Then said, "Good-by—good-by, John! I am going.
Martha, you'll write me how the boys are growing!
I may not ever see you three again.
But if I do your sons will be grown men:
They'll not remember me, who loved them so.
Good-by, John! Now your Auntie Tress must go;
I've always wished I had a little son
And you've been that to me—the only one."

John raised his blue eyes from the rug where lay
A train of bright red cars—just bought that day.
"Good-by!" he said. "You said 'Good-by' before,
Aunt Tress." He loved her, but she was a bore
Here with his engines. He gazed up at her—
With the preoccupied calm courtesy
A railroad magnate wears, trying to be
Kind to an overzealous canvasser
Of dream books. "Good-by, aunt!" She shut the door

Forever, like a reader closing down
The cover boards on Hardy's Tess; her frown
Of wonder drove the tears back; for a while
She stood outside the house and tried to smile.

BITTERS

"GET out now, lad!
Thanks for the drink.
Our well, I think
Needs a new pump—
The water's bad.
Get out now, lad—
That glass will do."

The boy stood still—
White-faced and ill.
"Father," he said,
"I've poisoned you.
It was a thing
I had to do.

"One night last spring
You poured mine out,
And never doubt
It did the work:
I have been dead
Since then," he said.

"When I was young
And very small,
And when I hung

On every word
Of yours I heard,
You loved me then:
I was so young
And very small:
And if I ever
Thought at all
It was but this:
My father is
Wisest of men.

You loved me then.

I grew; and when
I dared to find
A sort of mind
In my small head,
I think just then
You wished me dead,
For daring to
Cross wits with you.

I was a cup
Your pride filled up.
I was to be
An instrument
Your strength had bent.
You sought in me
Two hands, two feet,
To show your skill:

A life complete
Where you were free
To work your will
On flesh and bone.

Even at the first,
I had to pray
Just in your way.

When I grew wise
To read men's eyes,
'Twas then, you *knew*
I would not do:

Ah—then you brought
Hard feet to bear:
Little you care
What song I'd sing—
So then—last spring . . .

She—have you heard?
Married last night—
Ah, you were right—
Would you say so?
Nay, Dad, I know.

Therefore you die . . .
Pride, Dad—good-by!"

IN DECEMBER

A RAGGED, wistful boy breathing hard on a window,
Holding his father's hand as they stared in the toy shop:
Wide eyes edging along the breath-fogged glass pane,
Staring in at a show of spinning engines:
Swift-rocking bars, wheels geared and cogged and belted,
Gravely comported in their small grave business—
Grave as the two dark eyes that stared so wistfully
On that December night, into the toy shop;
Grave as the lips that whispered up to the father
Bent, gray and grimly poor, who stood beside him
With eyes as grave as the boy's eyes, and heart no less wistful,
"Dad!" "Yes, boy." "I don't want that old engine—do I?"

AT THE DOORWAY

He found a young girl, waiting at his doorway;
She spoke to him—was hungry—so she said:
Studied three days a week—the other four days
Sat in the parks, or walked—she had no bed.

Her face was sharp with want, but her young eyes were
Tinged with the frank, gray, haunting Celtic blue.
Her dress was shabby and her shoes were broken.
Her voice was deep and clear, but tragic too.

The boy unlatched the door. He scarcely answered.
She followed him up to a garret room,
Bare save a bed, a stove, a pile of pictures,
And chill with all the dankness of a tomb.

"This is the best I have." She did not hear him,
So tired her heart was and so worn her feet.
She sat blank-eyed before the fire he built her,
Hungering cat-like for a bite to eat.

The boy pulled out a jug of musty sherry:
He had one cup,—half filled it first for her;

She reached with shivering fingers, sipped, looked round her,
And saw how poor he was, but did not stir.

There were two herring, smoked and dried and dusty
In an old box the rats had not yet found,
A bit of rocky bread, a bag of coffee,—
Whole berries that were stamped on, and so ground.

The savor of the food soon reached her nostrils.
The girl watched gravely, as the fish were fried,
Hungrily keeping down her working fingers;
The boy blushed as they stood so, side by side.

They met each other's eyes, both smiled—though grimly:
The woman sank upon the tousled bed;
They drank; they shared the fish; the play was ended;
Dark fell; the fire went out; she earned her bread.

ILLUSION

Down through the weed-grown farmyard, just at sunrise,
Came a slim, stern-eyed lad of twelve years old:
Clutched in his hand a bunch of dew-soaked flowers,
Tansy and Zinnia and Marigold.

He shuffled on; the damp rank Yarrow heads made
Dark splashes on his faded overalls;
Unnoticed gems lay speared on every grass blade,
And shimmering webs edged round the garden walls.

Earth flushed that hour in ecstasies of giving
That even the sunrise shared and made profound:
A fragrance past life's need in all things living:
A coolth and benediction in the ground.

But in the boy's eyes, grief past Nature's healing:
This clear cool sunrise filled his drink of woe;
The dawn flowers even—and the grass snared dew-drops;
And the clean smells of earth, and all her show.

The red gate crackled on its broken hinges;
The boy turned down, waist high in autumn corn,

Heart sore at even the lane's remembered turnings,
  At all earth's common garb so gaily worn.

Over the hillside to the county turnpike,
  Then down along the bridge (she came that way),
A double iron gate, a barren graveyard,
  And red new earth, heaped where the boy's heart lay.

So every morning till the month was over
  He mourned the lovely lady in the ground:
He had scarce known her name, but was her lover,—
  With grave dumb passion—deep, past sight or sound.

She had come down this road with him in April,
  Tall, lithe, below her mist of yellow hair,
Had hailed him in a hearty, friendly greeting
  That sent the farm boy walking home on air.

Some three more meetings on the road: one June day
  They'd sat at sun up where this road bend came,
All the lad's heart laid bare, in youth's bravado,
  While morning rose about them like a flame.

In her deep eyes, true gleam of understanding,
  That made him wonder why their lids grew moist

At all the bold, clean, mad, twelve-year-old dreamings
That till her touch had stirred his soul, unvoiced:

Until at last she rose and it was ended:
Rose—did he dream—trembling, too falsely gay:
And it was ended now forever and ever;
He had not asked her why she wept that day:

He laid his lips on the new ivy plants
That stretched their roots so deep beneath the mound,
And to his eyes those leaves seemed fresher green
That hid his lovely lady in the ground:

So the boy lingered, lost in dreams, beside her,
And did not hear the second mourner's tread,
Toiling across the grave lots, through the brambles,
Uncomfortably stumbling on the dead.

At sight of that bent figure by the ivy,
The man choked back a cry, and silently
Stole down behind the bushes near the chapel.
"She always had her slaves, Lill had," thought he.

On the boy's face he saw the awe and fervor
Of Youth's ecstatic dream of deathless love:
He waited: the cigar burnt to his fingers . . .
It seemed a sight he could not weary of.

The breakfast call clanged down across the meadow:
Still lost in dreams, the boy rose from that grave,
And through the iron gate, with halting footsteps,
Passed round the road bend where the corn tops wave.

The second mourner followed. Where her mound rose
He looked with new-gained reverence, as he passed.
"Dirty as you have played me, Lill; by Glory,
You must have been a wonder—to the last!"

SHIRTWAISTS

"CHANGE, Cash! Oh, Mr. Little, sign this slip!
Yes, Miss, these goods have been reduced from two—
They won't be here much longer. . . . No. We've got
A thirty-six bust in that pongee waist
But thirty-eights is out. . . . This lot is sold!
Yes, Miss, them poplins is the go this spring.
This here lot's sold, except those stripes in gray.
Change? Was it five you gave me, Miss? No, Ma'am,
We never warrant that these dyes will hold. . . .
Sixty-nine, seventy, one, two, four, five.
Thanks! Call again! The notions? Third aisle down.
(Rebe—did you see that lame guy amble past?)
If it fades, Madam, wash it in a basin
With blue crêpe paper—only ten a roll.
(Rebe—Rebe! Here comes that lame guy back again!)"

Rebe raised her tousled chestnut hair and gasped—
"Oh, for the love of—keep in front of me!
That's Morton! It's too late—he saw, all right;
I guess he's had me spotted long ago."

"He looked queer, for a fact, but I don't know—
I think he's going out—I think—"
"He saw me!
I gotta get my time!"
"Don't be a fool!
How can he hurt you? This ain't in the movies.
This is real life, kid."
Brown-haired Rebe looked up.
"Real life? you bet it is. But honest, Sue,
You don't know what life means, kid. Lord, I hope
You never find out like I had to do!
Sheetings? You get them on the second floor."

IN THE DAY'S WORK

He clumped out, shut the door, and left her cowed;
Only her hate, he did not keep in thrall. . . .
She sat awhile and planned how he might die—
Then roused, to hear strange voices in her hall.

Two oilers led her old man to the room,
And what she saw was like a dream come true:
His eyes were bandaged: "Number four blew out
When I was stoking—I've gone blind!" "Blind?
You?"

Her body was a song then. For a day
She beat him till his thick gray hair ran red:
"That's for a thousand Hells I've had right here—
God answers prayer, He does," the old wife said.

Then, when they woke next morning, she could see
Those thick scarred hands groping the spread
beside her.
"Wake up, Moll!" whined her man, "an' git some
work.
I dassay as you'll prove a good provider."

She took her worn coat down, and in the city
Knocked on strange doors for work the whole day through;
So she discovered Fate's profoundest pity;
Time scants man's cloth of joy—when dreams come true.

AUNT JOSIE'S CHATTY LETTER

DEAR MOLLY:

I have heard with joy
The news. I'm glad your trouble's through.
It's nice your first one is a boy.
We're down at Newport now—we two,
But I've been worried all the time:
Here at the shore she suffers so.
I don't know where we'll have to go.
I'd like to be in town with you:
You're all alone and it's a pity;
In summer, though, she hates the city,
So you can see it wouldn't do.
When the hot wave came, this July,
I was afraid that she might die:
I held her, most of that first night,
Under the spicket, for she lay
Limp like a dead thing—wouldn't say
A word to me. So, in my fright,
I tried to wire you. At last
The sea breeze came—her faintness passed,
And thank God, now she seems all right.
Her tail feather—the greenish blue one
Is coming in again. The new one

Seems darker than the old ones do.
I trust the baby looks like you,
And that you both are on the mend.
But Polly's calling. I must end.

STEEPLECHASE

Blue rompers, and loose corn-silk hair,
  Deep eyes, legs slim and long,—
But straighter than a wand was she
  To whom I sing my song:

In Combination thirty-three
  We hit the slide together—
Just by some trick of circumstance,
Some call it luck and some say chance,
  Which rules life's April weather.

I saw at once that she was fair—
  And that her hair was golden:
We smiled and picked each other up,
And from the polished wooden cup
  I drew her—much beholden.

I asked: "Who's with you, Goldilocks?"
  Answers: "My pal has wended:
A Yiddish girl, with fatter legs,
Has ran away with Harry Meggs
  And left me—unattended."

"Then let me show you round," says I,
"Glance over my collection
Of eyes and ears and nose and such!
Try me! I like *you* very much:
Voice, nose, eyes, and complexion."

She was a lovely little bit
To cuddle and canoodle:
The golden hair of her, I swear,
Was boodle—simply boodle;
A miser bold, I eyes her gold—
Boodle—perfect boodle!

I held her in the Swing of Death;
I looked on her and lost my breath,
So come she took to smiling;
I held for fair, and gulped for air:
My soul her gaze beguiling.

I asked her down along the sea,
Where it was lone and shady:
I drew the lovely girl to me
And called her Little Lady.

And, by the gods, in some blame way,
I gets her—her the saintly:
Dear Mary Grey consents to say
"I love you," mighty quaintly;

I married her—that night in June,
And life runs like a tango tune,
  So far, with me and Mary;
Maybe I sometimes mash her feet,
But on she onesteps calm and sweet
  And never drags contrary.

We neither had too much to eat,
  That night as was our wedding—
And only green grass for our feet
  With pine leaves for a bedding;

But, Man! We've got the grub since then,
  And, Boy! we're in the clover,
With four a day for steady pay—
  Time and a half for over.

And when I walk or sing or play,
  It's with my gold-haired crony,
For Heaven's moved out Harlem way,
Since love and I and Mary Grey
  Fell through that slide at Coney.

THREE SMILES ON VINE STREET

A CAR came by. The old man let it pass:
The darkness thickened down the dingy street:
The city's sounds came muffled—faint and far;
And rare and loud the clump of passing feet.

"Yonder," he mused, "by that old sandwich stand
We saw the silver—dived for it. My hand,
Being the stronger, took it; held it too;
Tore it away from her—my hunger did—
Not I; so as we rose the lamplight fell
Sharp on her lifted face. (God! How time flies!)
I've forty years of thinking on those eyes—
Blazing in hate through all their cornflower blue.

"'That's mine, you!' the girl screamed. 'Yah, sis,
that's true.'
I came back and it took her wind away:
She snatched the cart wheel, started off, but then
Turned puzzling round once more and seemed to
stay,
Somehow, against her will—to stare at me—
What kind of duck I was. 'Look here!' says she,
'What's'—then I saw a kind of dawning frown
Come on her face; she faltered—looked sharp down
At my split uppers—'I remember too

Now—I do sure!' The cold wind caught her hair
And tossed it in her eyes, whose lashes were
Burdened with little drifts of powdered snow. . . .

"There where the sandwich woman's stove is
smoking
And her red face smirks up as men come by,
Across those bricks where sparrows hop for bread
crumbs
And draymen stamp their feet and bolt their pie—
There on that pavement by that stand—(Oh,
Mother
Of Mercies, how the years go! Go? Are gone!)
There in the twilight with the dry snow falling
I saw her face. There in that winter twilight:
The face that six months earlier, warm and beam-
ing,
Had flushed and smiled in friendship, as we came
Over the Vine Street Ferry that June dawning,
When Christ Church spire rose a spear of flame
Into the dusk: Her sennet and her ginghams
Were brave enough that morning in my eyes;
Her face—I had not dreamed one could be lovely
As hers—a face whose sunny memories,"
He mused, "were like warm odors that might rise
From roses, were young roses human featured.
I was too shy to speak (Ah, God!) but wondered
If I might ever see that face again
There in that unknown world of life and labor—

The city's wilderness of battling men:
So innocent and still so mere a child.
Then when the crowd streamed out across the gangway,
She must have felt my gaze upon her face,
For with a slow, shy, dear, unstudied grace
She lifted her young lips toward mine and smiled."

The old man shook his head. "That's cruel plain!"
And, for a while, he watched the lamp flame flare,
Till musing on as if no streets were there
He felt that winter's fingers stroke his hair
And in his eyes the stars came out again. . . .
They'd stood awhile right there together—they two:
She holding that old cart wheel in her hand.
It did not seem as if she cared to go.
He asked had she eat supper. She snapped, "No!
Nor hadn't looked to have—leastwise—leastwise—
She had eat supper—like—that is—" She tried
To look at him again—to meet his eyes,
But flushed and failed,—so he was sure she lied.
"And you?" she challenged. "Had he eaten?"
"Yes!"
"Hearty?"—It wasn't hearty by her guess.
Then looking down he saw the white flesh through
The undarned stocking in his broken shoe. . . .

Then how they'd talked—and how his eyes grew bold,
And how her hand came tight around his arm,

As with their bodies close against the cold
They'd trudged together through that smothering
storm.

Then came that parting at the chophouse door:
His quick impulsive push that sent her in:
He'd said, "I've got to get back—back to store—
Eat all you can, kid; I got lots of tin!
I got a steady job—up there," he'd said.
"Same time tomorrow, where we met?"—then
fled,
Weakening at the smell of food inside:
It should be all hers—all hers if he died!
"I got a steady job, kid—so you see
One buck, like that, ain't nothing much to me."

The winter wind had worried through his hair,
And hunger was a lightness in his head,
While underneath his feet, at every tread,
The searching snow, banked in its drifts since
noon—
The dry, cold snow squeaked out its maddening
tune.

Next night nor next he did not meet her there:
His humming mills of misery ground on;
And when he found at last the bit to share,
He waited vainly, for the girl was gone:
Then night by night until the year ran out
He'd come and watched at the appointed place:

So year by year, while hope grew faint as doubt
He'd paced the pavements, thirsting for her face.

The old man rubbed his worn and knotty hands
And sighed a little, as the streets grew still;
While the far pant of engines on the ways,
Sighed down the long bleak aisles from Callowhill.
Then, in the silence of the city's sleep,
He seemed to hear faint steps and saw her raise
Her grave young eyes and toss her snow-starred hair;
He felt her slim, cold, trembling fingers steal
To touch his own—not numb while hers were there;
He heard that wailing blast where-through they beat,
And walked the night with gay but bleeding feet.
Caught that clear voice out of his long ago;
Saw those frank eyes whose fate he knew not of . . .
Under this awning in that winter's snow
They spoke. His speech had quickened into love.

The news stand woman put her pies away,
And piled the papers on her broken chair;
Then banked her little fire against the day
And rose with reddened face to smooth her hair;
The old man bought a paper of old Sal,
Who smiled her bent wry smile to see him there;
Who hobbled from her stove and spoke to him,
And with her fat hand patted her white hair.

He took his paper—did not wait for change,
But down the hollow highway clumped along,
Still dreaming dreams too hopeless and too wise
For any words to mar, in any song:
The woman murmured, "Thank you, sir! God
bless ye!"
And followed his dim form with anxious eyes;
Then, as the shuffling footsteps died away
She cried, "Poor Dick! He's like some child gone
gray.
What's it about him gets me thinking so?
He must a had my number—in his day."

HER GIFT

I

She had worked hard and skimped and saved to
get it,
And when he took the long thin parcel up
The woman watched—her lifted coffee cup
Shook in her hand, then slowly settled down—
For she had seen his gathering, worried frown:
"May—you've no business buying stuff for me!"
"Wait till you open it—wait till you see!
I—" a scared, anxious smile was in her eyes
That had been hoping for his glad surprise
Which did not come as she had meant it to.

He stripped the wrappings off and saw the blue
Octagonal barrel and the smooth, curved stock—
Brown satin to the touch: he saw the lock
And trigger guard, and wondered what to do—
And what might be worth saying now. . . . He
knew
How long she must have skimped herself to buy
A thing like this—he knew it and would try
Never to let her know—to let her see . . .

"May," he said, "May—you bought this gun for
me?"

She nodded and the tears sprang to her eyes—
"You didn't want it? It was my surprise—
For Christmas, Sam, but I had ought to known
It wouldn't suit you. 'Gee, I'd like to own
A real gun once!' you said. It's not much good—
I know that, but I bought the best I could.
I've seen you chafing at your work: Oh, Sam—
I'm so—so sorry I married you—I am.
I've kept you back now, and it will be worse.
Last spring, one night, I heard you stamp and curse—
You in the bathroom—I outside the door.
I heard you, Sam—you cried out, 'One year more
And I'll be broke in chains—I'll be a slave
Bound in a treadmill—digging my own grave:
Sunrise to sunset—adding down a line
And carrying over everything past nine;
That's life—that's my cup—forty years, maybe.
O God, with all this lovely world to see!
I stick—I walk my little cart strake through,
And toil from dawn to sunset here—I do!'
I heard you say it, Sam—it burnt inside
Like fire—it took my heart out. Then I tried
To think some way, Sam, that would set you free—
Some way—but no way ever came to me.
Then when you took to reading, evenings, I
Wanted to talk so hard, Sam, but I'd try
Ever so harder to keep still and let
You have your chance to read then, and forget—
You reading Pluck and Luck, while I sat sewing.

Sometimes I thought—after all, things are going
Well—not so fine—but so-so, anyway.
That was all last spring, and then came the day
I'd longed for, Sam, and hoped for—dreaded too
Because it meant one more big chain for you.
Then I thought hard—what is there I can do
To make things even? Then this came to me:
There isn't anything will set him free,
But maybe he could play at being so
Like men in books. I know it can't be real.
I hold him back from that—I and my child—
But, dear God! somehow let him get the feel
Of being free—hunting and living wild
Like all men want. So, Sam, I got the gun
Just so's you could hunt birds on holidays,
Or shoot—down cellar, when your work was done . . .
Be careful, please—it might be loaded now—
I tried to open it, but can't see how.
There is a place down cellar that might do:
Try it down there, Sam, while I wait for you."

The man's arms trembled from her waist—he rose
And took the gun. She heard the hall door close;
Heard him go stumping down the cellar stairs;
Then caught a little stir among the chairs
That were piled up for him to fix—some day:
She turned to clear the morning meal away
And wondered when the shooting would begin. . . .

II

The clerk's hand glided down the smooth brown
stock.
His fingers fumbled at the rifle lock,
But could not open it at first. It seemed
As though the gun were something to be dreamed,
Not used. So, with an unfamiliar hand,
He pulled the hammer, and then tried to stand
Gracefully up, as pictured huntsmen do:
He felt all crouched down somehow, but he threw
His bottle shoulders back and tried again.
"I'm different built," he thought, "from other
men—
I've had nobody all my life to show
How to do things all men are s'posed to know."
He tried to press the trigger—then changed his
mind:
"If this burst in my face I might go blind,
And then what would become of May—and him?—
No! I'm afraid—that's all." His lips grew grim.
"I'm a damned coward and I've always been—
I won't lie to myself." His poor weak chin
Stiffened at that. "I'll do it now or die!"
He raised the rifle—cast his blinking eye
Down the dark wavering barrel, sighting grimly
On the far wall—half pulled—then wondering
dimly
Whether the bullet might bounce back or not;
Shuddered and sought him out a safer spot,

Aiming against the coal bin's wooden side—
Took sight upon a knot—pulled—pulled—then tried
Both fingers, bracing shoulder for the kick:
The hammer fell with a sharp, sudden click
Upon the empty chamber. With a frown
He wiped the sweat from his cold brow, sat down
And thought a moment—then struck one noisy blow
On an old box side—so that she might hear,
And slowly climbed the stair. "I tried it, dear,"
He said—back in the kitchen—to his wife.
"It's just what I've been wanting all my life:
It—somehow though, May, somehow though—
somehow—
I think I'd rather keep it clean—just now.
I'll look at it—that's what—what I'd enjoy—
And it'll be like new—to give our boy."

SONG

Oh, winds that hover o'er night and day!
Rain with your trailing hair!
Flowers that skirt the kirtle of May!
Is not my love too fair?

Too fair—too fair?

Blue eyes, rose cheeks, and raven hair;
Slim thighs, brown breasts, or ivory
Of smiles above the dimpled chin,
Warm hands and yielding lips and flawless skin!
I may not through your splendors win
To any hint of soul therein.

Therefore I say, you are too fair.

Lady, forgive me! I am over bold
To wish you old,
That all your inner grace be seen
When boughs are bare,
That were triumphant now, save that eyes, cheeks, lips, hair,
Come so between
Me, and the lovelier thing unseen—

I know—I know is there.

THE AMERICAN

I HAVE no race, nor ancient wrongs:
I do not even know
How many of my sires came
From countries far too far to name:
I am a mongrel with no shame
For what is in my blood.

I dare not boast a single line,
Nor show one chance heroic strain;
I cannot feel myself the seed
Of some far patriot's stirring deed—
It does not seem to be a need
Among my friends.

For of my fathers, some were rude,
Some old and sick for solitude;
A few were mad for blood and gold,
And others merely poor and cold
And kind.

And some sought food and some sought wine;
Some were for lust and some for land—
Now all their gathered griefs are mine,
And all their hopes are in my hand:

Some sought the stars of other skies,
  And some new worlds to win and sway;
Some wanted freedom for their eyes
  And some had need to think and say;

Some craved the gift to lie alone
  With labor done and heart at ease,
To heed the pausing monotone
  Of laughing winds among the trees;

Some were for women, some for sleep;
  Some craved salt kisses of the sea;
And some were fools that sin and weep—
  Now all their strains are fleshed in me.

THE IMMORAL MONOLOGUE OF MORTAL IGNORANCE

All the children of the earth
Bear to Nature equal worth:
Topaz from Brazilian mine,
Ruby on the barnyard vine,
Green moss in a rich man's garden,
Luscious lips of Dolly Varden,
Or the slow snail's slimy trace,
Or a drunkard's blotchy face:
All inevitable feats
Wherein buoyant Nature greets
With her work so neatly done,
Every lifting of the sun.

Something has as deftly planned
And wrought with like unfailing hand
On Jock's cheeks, to catch that hue,
Thirty heedful winters through
Led his hand to the ale house latches:
So presents these purple patches
To man's gaze, with equal pride
Of a high craft justified,
As when those selfsame hues appear
After many a patient year
On a bit of flame-blued metal
Or a wild geranium's petal.

But I shudder at the one
And I smile to greet the other—
Clearly not Dame Nature's brother
Like the sun:
He and she praise one another:
Purple patches are to them,
On a cheek or on men's noses,
Or the velvet garment hem
Of the least immodest roses,
Neither fairer here nor there;
They know neither foul nor fair.

May my judgment, therefore, be
Indiscriminately free,
To commend the simple doing
With no sense of goal pursuing?

Hero, traitor, zealot, prude,
Languid, lovely, patient, lewd—
Shall I hold them all a kind?
Gold the lot—to each its worth;
Gold, by patient years refined
In the bosom of the earth,
Minted now, and bearing on it
Verity's imperial bonnet?

Or if somehow this seems wry
And red noses do not please me,

Since I am not honored by
Nature's private— This I try—
This I seek, good friend, to do
With the help of Time and you!
Shall I say—like sweet and sour
Why things please me—Heaven knows:
Why I praise a dawn-flushed flower,
But regret a scarlet nose.

So as on Life's crumbs I bite,
Munching this or that at random,
Sirs, I choose my appetite
As my guide. . . . *De gustibus*
(Who said that?) *non disputandum.*
Anyhow, sirs—'tis my creed:
What I love is what I need.

TO A SLEEPING CHILD

Old legends to my eyes grow clear
As I behold you;
Old hates within my arms lie dear
When I enfold you:
For pulsing from ten million hearts
Is your heart's throb,
And wailing from all eyes that were
These tears you sob;
While warring realms are reconciled
With seals of sleep—

When you have smiled.

IN THE DESERT

Across the hot sand
He pushed his burnt feet,
And the sound was like rain—
Sweet—O God!
God how sweet!
As the sand pattered down
At the lift of his feet.

He spat out the pebble
He sucked, in his thirst;
Glared toward the hot sky,
And right ripely he cursed:
Not a loom, nor a shroud,
Nor the fleck of one cloud;
The gray air rose flame-dry
Toward a waterless sky.

Then across the hot sand,
As he bent with despair,
A wild woman came singing,
A wild woman all bare,
Came out of the west—
Fair—O God!
God, how fair!

She came and she hailed him,
And let down her hair:
'Twas like waves in dim shadows
Seen under cold skies;
And pools of new water,
Calm water, cold water—
The soul of sweet water
Lay moist in her eyes.

His lips reached, to taste
Of her eyes, of her hair,
To lay on their beauty
A tribute, a prayer:
But her lips and her bosom
Bloomed under him there;
And her lips and her bosom
Grew horribly fair:
He forsook the cool water,
Sweet under his tongue,—
Cried, "I thirst, but, O Daughter
Of Joy—I am young!"
Then he clasped her smooth shoulders
But kissed not her eyes:
Kissed her breasts, kissed her fingers,
Her feet and her thighs . . .

He woke, blind and weary:
The touch of his hand
Crawled over her flesh;
But her flesh was brown sand.

Then the wind from the south came
And burnt to his bone,
And parched those full lips
That made never one moan,
But smiled, lying silent. . . .
Dark fell and day rose—
Unthirsting—undreaming—
Unthirsting? God knows!

Dark fell; stars were gleaming—
It lay there alone:
Unthirsting, undreaming,
Nor lusting, nor scheming,—
Day died and stars shone.

PROPRIETY

I saw two elderly ladies purse their lips up:
A girl came in—white spats—dress high to the shoe tops—
Cherrily-eyed—fresh-cheeked—alive to the spray tips
Of the brisk, nodding aigrettes on her turban.
Down she plumped in the seat, by a man with a paper:
He moved and spoke; she spoke and moved,—both answered:
A little flash of common human feeling
Kindling a casual flame of intercourse—
So that they talked a little, laughed, grew silent
And stared out of the windows. I envied them
That little freshening of their stock of kindness. . . .
She rose—her station, and the man rose with her;
Helped on her velvet coat—a russet velvet,—
Smiled and sat down, then bowed to her through the window;
For the next hundred miles still smiled as he read his paper.

I saw two elderly ladies purse their lips up.

GHOSTS

It was a pleasant place to play,
And every sunny Saturday
They raced across its broken ground,
Or sang, and laid lace flowers around
  Each mossy mound.

Some left the place at evensong;
But others played there, all night long,
  With never a sound.

THE CHATTERBOX SMELL

In the winter evening, when my work was finished,
I opened your book and sat me to read in the lamplight;
Sat me to read, Walt Whitman, your rude and rasping melodies;
Sat me to hear your old voice, rough with its weathered wisdom.
I opened your book, and from the new page, to my nostrils
Came a faint thrilling scent, of the size and the oils of the ink pot;
A savor that threw me back, full twenty years to my childhood,
To woodcuts vaguely discerned on the mackled pages of memory;
To seasides with storm-tossed ships, to my childish tears dropped upon them;
To one small long-haired maid straying wild-eyed in a corn field;
To streets forgotten till now; doors with knockers and high dim hallways;
And the wistful faces of boys peering out through the leaded windows.

I opened your book and smelled it: I heard no
more Drum Taps, Walt Whitman,
But you will believe, that the poem I smelled there
was much to my liking:
A good honest print house smell—it would please
you too, old gray poet,
To have me lose grip of your words, in the grip of
the real things you worshiped.

CREOLE KATE

(How Kitty, the wench from Baton Rouge,
And Handsome Joe Norvell
Met, and loved, in their tropic way,
Till time wound on for a year and a day,
My story does not tell.

That Joe was a handsome lecherous brute
Of the sleek ungodly kind,
That love, in the heart of Creole Kate,
Was anything else than blind—
All that is the tale of a year ago
In the Galilee Fisherman's Hall,
When Creole Kate in her cornflower dress,
Pale Kate, the dark-eyed sorceress,
Went home with the steady of Shewobble Jess,
From the Fords of Jordan Ball.)

Out toward the sunset stared Kitty the wench,
And her eyes were a feverish red
When she turned away to the box, that lay
By the foot of her broken bed;
And the black babe woke as she sang her song;
And the smoky lamp burned low,
As Kitty, the drooping yellow rose,
Laid out on her bed her party clothes:

The cornflower dress with a red blood spot
And the clinging odor of Bergamot
And the faded furbelow.
While watching, and fumbling the knob of the door
With haste on his heart like a band
Stood Handsome Joe, in a sweat to go,
With her purse in the crook of his hand. . . .

The little pickaninny's cries
Chuckled to silence. The warm head
Sank on its mother's scrawny breast,
Who held it there a little—then said,
Raising her heavy fevered eyes,
" He's asleep now and Ah'm mos' dressed.
Ah knew you'd come to take me, Joe."
" Dressed?" He looked down and it was so:
About her wasted shoulders hung—
(How round and plump a year ago!)
A purple bodice—half a rag,
That sagged about her like a bag,
She was so thin. Upon the bed
Lay two silk stockings, crimson red,
Worn out and mended at the toes.
" Her legs would flop around in them,"
He thought. " She's almost gone—God knows!"
" Ah knew you'd come," the woman said;
Her long thin fingers, where the bone
Seemed pushing out to pierce the skin,

Came round his sleek black neck. "Ah knew
That Ah could bet my life on you!"
He shivered when she spoke, and "No!"
He cried, "I gotta work tonight—
I told you that I couldn't go;
An' you ain't nowise fit to be
Out in that night air—ef I could."
"Joe! Joe!" she wailed. "Oh, Lawdy me,
Ah feels so bad—Ah thought we'd have
One night, lak old times, after all,
Lak last year's Fords of Jordan Ball.
Hones'—Joe—Joe boy, treat me good!"
He felt the poison of her breath.
She smiled on him like grinning death.
So while Kate bent to fix her hair
He'd turned the knob and left her there. . . .

Out through the starlight stared Kitty the wench
And her eyes were hot with tears;
Her elbow lay, on the old cracked sill
Ringed white with her lover's beers,
And the babe in the soap box slept like death,
And the smoky lamp burned low,
While Kitty, the drooping yellow rose,
Watched through the night in her party clothes
Of that life-long year ago. . . .

The little pickanniny woke;
The mother's eyes came open too:
Far through the night a voice she knew

Rang out: "Mah love's a high-born lady."
And then, "She's dark, but not too shady,
Feathered like a peacock—" Closer then
The clear voice started in again:
"Pov piti Momzel Zizi!—Zizi!
Li gag-an bo bo.
Dass so piti cur a li—a li
Li gag-an bo bo!"
Then a girl's shrill voice in the street below
Chimed in to it, "Gag-an bo bo!"
And Kitty the wench turned white at the sound,
As if all her black blood sought her heart at one
bound. . . .

Li gag-an bo bo! . . .
Out there, in the starlight, walked Shewobble Jess,
On the arm of Handsome Joe:
Shewobble Jess, the dimpled belle,
That had led her twenty or more to Hell:
There in the dawnlight walked Shewobble Jess,
With a scornful smile to throw
At the hot red eyes of Kitty the wench,
Looking down from the window there,
At the glaring eyes of Creole Kate,
At the rumpled rose in her hair.

Back from the window Kitty came,
Laid off the dress she needed not:
The cornflower dress with a red blood spot
And the clinging odor of Bergamot.

Back from the window Kitty came,
Lifted the lamp with the smoky flame,
Then kissed her black baby and turned away
And let the licking lamp flame play:
First on the belt, with its true-love knot,
Of the cornflower dress with a red blood spot
And the clinging odor of Bergamot.

Then the smoke twined up and the walls grew red
From the blazing straw of her broken bed.
Out through the night went a dart of flame,
And a hoarse voice called, Kate! Kate!—her
name:
As up from the pavement a shrill laugh came,
And then the plash of a sudden blow—
Up through the dawn from the street below:
Then Yaller Kate smiled; it was good to know
How the story ended. Her thick lips cried,
"Ah hopes you bust her jaw! Ah knew,
Joe boy, that Ah could count on you!"

You saw that bent black man we passed?
His face all warped and seared, one side?
Well—even niggers have their pride—
Good night! Oh, no! Of course she died.
Joe passed for hero. To my whim,
Considering the race and all
Its habitudes—the laurels fall
On Jess—somehow. Her deed seems grim:
She married what was left of him.

OPAL

'Twas clearly seen that she had been
  Busy with soap and water:
When in she came, with cheeks aflame—
  This gay-eyed farmer's daughter.

Her arms were brown, with golden down
  Laid daintily along them;
Mid little freckling orange suns—
Such delicate, evasive ones
  That naming them might wrong them.

She was a living April dawn,
  A child of sun and air,
The very forest leaves seemed bound
  Through her rebellious hair.

The fellow in the trolley door
  Gazed, baffled by her splendor;
Gazed with a gaze both calm and clear,
  And even warm and tender:

He scanned the primly ironed gown,
  The lace, the scarlet band,
The simple chain upon her neck,
  The brown uncultured hand;

He caught the curious airs of her,
(She watched him all the while)
He saw the rising breasts of her—
And soon forgot to smile:

Forth, from her little bag, she drew
A ring; then slipped it on—
An opal like a great pale moon
Freaked with the scarlet dawn.

A lovely ring—too large for her,
Although she held it there.
He thought, Oh, little lady, you
Aren't half so wise as fair.
For, Lady, rings are paltry things
To that clear smile you wear!

"Perhaps I'm but a fool," mused he,
"To waste my time today;
But here's a creature, fresh as June,
Walking an old worn way:
The fall that waits those feet of her,
Somehow my hand might stay."

He sat beside the country girl
And, in a little while,
By arts well known to city men,
Made the small creature smile;

They talked a bit, and talk grew gay;
He pleaded—she denied;
She had a date, she said, but still
The trolley sped toward Merchantville
And held them side by side.

He rang; the car drew up, before
A little brookside town;
The man said, "Let's get off awhile!"
And firmly helped her down,—
Shyly and half unwillingly
She let him help her down.

As his firm fingers pressed her hand
She blushed in pleasant shame:
And from the great ring stone she wore
Some inner vein of glowing ore
Flashed with a hungry flame. . . .

They strolled along the stream awhile,
Grew friends indeed, though he
Could not yet say the thing he planned,—
But merely held the warm brown hand
She gave him—tenderly.

Moonlight and then the wooded stream—
The warm earth-scented breeze—
The low canoe—the drifting stars—
The covert of the trees—

And need to save her from the spell
  Of magic hours like these—

He stared down sternly—set his teeth,
  Closed eyes—gazed down again,—
But ere he spoke, she smiled on him—
  All her soul smiled,—and then
His lips and hers were fire to meet—
  His ways—the ways of men.

Over their boat the grave stars climb,
  The strolling moonlight creeps—
While warm and weary, curled therein,
All innocent of star or sin,
  A little lady sleeps:

Over their boat the grave stars climb,
  The strolling moonlight creeps—
A man sits staring into time,
  And solemn consort keeps
With tragic visions, old and wild,—
While gently, like a weary child,
  The little lady sleeps.

AN OLD STORY

Sinologists say
That Yang Chu and Mo Ti
Lived four-fifty B.C.
In Cathay.

Said Mo Ti to Yang Chu,
"What you say—what you do
Should conform to the need
Of the race—of the breed—
That's my creed,—there's Man's duty."
"I," answered Yang Chu,
"Seek just pleasure and beauty:
Here's life and an hour;
The quotient, for me
Is having my taste
Of the corn and the vine,
With a singing girl's waist
For my arms to entwine;
For Duty's a drab,
And Glory's the same:
When I end—on a slab,
Where's my profit in Fame?
While just Heaven supplies

Curves, dimples, and lips
For my choosing,—
Is it Yang Chu that slips—
Not refusing?"

To Yang Chu cried Mo Ti,
"No folly for me!
I've a service to do,
And a problem to face:
If men dally like you,
What becomes of our Race?"

Said Yang Chu to Mo Ti,
"I don't know. Here's cool wine,
Bully boy! While I drink
You may sit back and think.
That riddle's not mine.
What, man! Would you rob
The Maker of credit?
He conceived it—He bred it—
He'll finish the job
When we're laid on the shelf!
Since you cherish the race,
Don't grow blue in the face
If the race loves itself.

Then they argued awhile,
Till Yang Chu, with a smile
Closed his eyes, and fell over
Dead drunk in the clover.

Mo Ti, running through
The clothes of Yang Chu,
(Just—guardian like)
Happened somehow, to strike
On a purse. Then he sighed
And sank down with a groan,
(Urged by Duty alone)
To sort and divide
The wealth of this man
On the fair social plan:
One Cash for the sleeper—
The true millionth share;
For the rest—one Mo Ti,
(In the lack of a better)
Might be trusted to care.

But since nothing should be
Just given, scot free;
But for service—as, say:
For clothes, victuals, or bed,
Or for housing the dead,
Or for shaving the living,
(No other so handy—
Mo Ti must consent,
For the race—shave, use scent,
And then dress like a dandy)
The real social giving.

So Mo Ti went his way
The sinologists say,

And he must have done well,
Though there's no one to tell
Who won the debate—
Which stands open to date:

For the race is still here,—
Also wine and good cheer
And free kissing:
But Yang Chu and Mo Ti,
Since four hundred B.C.
Have been missing.

POT POURRI ON A CAT HOSPITAL AMBULANCE

Crossing Cop Loquitur

Step back, sir! Are you deef, mate? Let it by!
They're driving in a hurry—can't you see?
And Mrs. Miller's motor, with its fancy feeleen freight,
Has very little time for you and me.

Chorus of Cat Mammas

Yes! A gray Maltese in Roxborough is panting with the heat,
And a Tortoise Shell in Darby has the mange;
Dear little Fuss and Feathers got some splinters in her feet,
And Pettsy Wettsy's eye looks red and strange.

Intellectual Pedestrian

Step back, old lady—careful! Let it pass!
This old dame's crotchet—much like yours might be.
Don't mind a splash upon your drabbled gown;
Remember it was flung in Charity.

Chorus of Mammas

Poor Mrs. Fitz-Magruder's Royal Siamese is low;
And Lady Button-Dutton's Cutey Beauty tries to sneeze;
And they'll put a splint on Sugar's broken limb, that hurts her so,
And sponge poor suffering Sweetheart for the fleas.

Humane Ambulance Driver

Step back there, Liz! You're walking like a dope!
Hey, wake up, Mose! Don't git yer feet chewed off!
Heads up there, Rabbi! Let this car git out:
A Persian Tabby has the whooping cough.

Chorus of Mammas

Oh, my little Tommy Wommy has a feather in his throat,
And Rolly Polly's mouse, I fear, was old;
Dear Driver, speed down Chestnut Street! I urge you, use third gear!
My precious Ducky Darling's catching cold.

Decadent Sentimentalist

Step back, old man—be heedful—let it pass!
Grope on, old lady, with your muddy dress!

You're not a Cutey Beauty, and you come of common breeds—
Way out of Mrs. Miller's range, I guess.

Social Democrat

(*changing the meter by way of protest*)

Yeh! Mrs. Miller had the bonds to make her will the law,
And ailing pups and pussies was the only want she saw;
But a hundred sweaty molders in a dank and stinking mill
Is leaching out their lives today, at Mrs. Miller's will.
Is leaching out their lives today for catnip and for cream,
For Mrs. Miller's pussy cats—the skimmed milk's for their starveling brats,
Whose friendless, merely human feet sustain the social scheme.

Bibulous Bystander

That ain't right now—come to think!
Step inside, sir, have a drink!
Dogged if I ain't gittin' sore—
Wot *is* Mankind toiling for?

Chorus of the Lady Trustees

Alas, poor Mrs. Miller's dead—so innocent and old;
And Mrs. Miller's body lies—decaying in the cold,
But Mrs. Miller's spirit charges on in her machine:
Humane—triumphant over death, and rising gasoline.

While Persian Tabbies suffer, while one tailless Manx sheds tears,
Dear Mrs. Miller's name shall be a symbol down the years;
A symbol of humanity, whose proper pride in pedigree
Shall elevate society, spread culture, peace, sobriety;
Perhaps in time produce a race
Of cats, with neither feet, nor face,
Nor fur, nor tails, nor ears.

The precious helpless dears.

THURSDAY EVENING

"Come in," called Fanny. The faint tappings
ceased then,
And the door opened. On the threshold stood
A tall gray woman, with a somber face
All worried over with fine lines. "Come in!"
Her face was whiter than a child's first sin,
And her thin hands were working feverishly.
She shut the door and slowly stared about—
Stiffly, as if her neck were hewn from wood;
Then, seeing no one, turned to sidle out,
But from the bedroom came Fan's hearty call:
"Sit down—I'll be in soon!" The woman started
And seemed to shudder at the sound. She had
A handbag on her arm, which she laid down
As though it held some heavy, precious freight
That bent her frail, thin fingers with its weight.

Then came the faint sound of a slamming door,
At which the woman, as if half in fear,
Sprang to her feet, but settled back again
As silence fell within the rooms. Once more
She looked about her. All these pleasant things:
The pictures, the bright rugs along the floor,

The books piled up, the lamplight's yellow stain
Over the blue brocades against the wall—
Were injuries to her, and in real pain
Her pale eyes closed. She moaned. Her lips grew thin;
She drew the handbag toward her and began
To speak. "She has all this," the woman said,
"And like as not in yonder room's her bed
All decked with lace and drawn work; and she wears
Silk and fine linen, like as not; and goes
Out flouncing in the streets and puts on airs
Along of reading poetry and such,
As if in book learning or peacock clothes
A woman's duty lay." Shrill the voice rose,
And Fan called, "I can't hear you. I can't hear
A word of all that. Wait a minute, won't you?"

The woman started and grew stiff. The sound
Of running water faintly rose and fell:
Again the restless pale eyes peered around
And found at last an old high desk, where lay
A pile of papers. She pushed back her chair
And for a long time almost breathless there
Bent over them and read—till Fan came in:
Fan—glorious and flushed, with loosened hair,
And that low, hearty, gripping trick of voice:
"How do you do?" she said. A puzzled frown
Gathered. She stared. The woman had laid down

The papers, one sheet fluttering to the floor,
As Fan came in. It lay there to be seen.
But Fan looked only at the drawn white face
That slowly turned toward hers without a sound.
"What's wrong—how can I help you—are you ill?"

The woman fumbled at the handbag's clasp
Until it opened with a snap, and then
Made answer in a dreaming, lifeless way:
"My name is Mary Siefert. . . . You can play
Those nasty-nice good manners on the men—
Don't try—I know you like a book—you thing!
You got my Bill to set and write you songs.
You got the soul of him: write songs—to you,
He did. I know he did. I read it there.
O God, have mercy—God in Heaven! That's where
I'll get it too—ah, God! You'll set me square!
I can fix part—the rest is Yours to do!"
Her voice shrilled up, and from the bag she drew
A deadly ominous shape of polished blue:
Fan's brown eyes widened. "Put that away!" she cried.
"Not till you've seen one woman's love proved true!"
Siefert's wife shrieked, face puckered, eyes ablaze.
The thin hands steadied as they strained to raise
The pistol. "God, don't shoot yourself! Wait! Wait!

Your husband—doesn't love me!" "That's too late;
I read those papers on your desk, and now
You're going to see how death and sin are wed."
"Don't let me see—I won't!" "You must!" Fan fled
Into her room and leaping on her bed
Hid her white face beneath the counterpane. . . .

There was a little time to wait—the strain
Of silence in the room grew hard to bear:
A shuffling, creeping tread, one knew not where.
And the eternal waiting for a sound
That did not come. Fan stirred and peered around.
Then the shot came: a creaking of the bed:
A startling stillness as if both were dead:
A queer low laugh: a faint, far-settling sigh.
One woman staggered back and dropped her pistol,
The other knew her day had come to die.
She lay there, looking idly at the ceiling:
The old familiar flowers swam round, grew dim.
She had no conscious pain: a spent old feeling
First, then a strong desire to look on him:
On him, wherefore she lay there spent and bleeding;
On him whereby her whole life wrecked and spilled;
On him who'd sought her at his hour of needing,
Who'd asked her utmost, and departed filled. . . .

Into the outer room came Mary Siefert,
Still flushed and trembling from the sight of blood.
"He's free at last—he's free—not hers, but mine now."
Self-pitying tears coursed down her cheeks. She stood
Motionless, weeping—till there came a sound
Of steps outside the door—steps, cautious, slow,
Inquisitive, uncertain, pausing here
A moment as if half in doubt or fear,
Then slowly on—each one a muffled blow
That seemed to beat against her pounding heart.
Closer they came and then paused by the door
And then went on—still pattering down the hall.
The woman's tense lips opened. She breathed once more,
But now began to stir in breathless haste:
First to the desk she ran and gathered all
That pile of neatly written papers, whereon
In close-spaced lines a human soul lay bare
In all its beauty, poverty, despair,
Its faiths denied, its hopes and hates foregone.
Upon the topmost sheet was written fair:
"From William Siefert to his song's begetter,
F. A. to whom his soul's self is chief debtor."
Which having seen, her hate had made her mad.

She took the bundle up and carried it
To a wide window opening on the street,

Which she raised softly, and then bit by bit
Fed out the papers to the wind, that threw
Some to the housetops, some below men's feet,
Some to the hands of people hurrying past;
So on that night, good men regaled their wives
By making comedy of broken lives,
In many a pleasant flat of Germantown.

The papers gone, she pulled the window down
And started out. Her bag lay on the table
And she turned back to get it—when a moan
From that half-open door arrested her;
For a long moment chilled to sudden stone
She stood and listened: then a low voice came—
A low, faint, trembling voice that called her name.
"I'm dying—get me help, please—for Bill's sake—"
The other's pale lips trembled piteously.
She started forward, and then pausing, cried,
"God, woman, it is for his sake you died—
For the soul of him, that you have tricked and led
Into forbidden paths. He was so good
And worked so hard until you crossed his way.
He was a steady fellow. Every day
He'd come home, tired out, to grub and bed;
Until you got his heart away from me.
Boss said, 'He's a good clerk. He'll make his
mark.'
I was who done it for him, got him out
Of spending time reading those punky books,

And gaping round all kind of harebrained schemes.
I got him out of that—made him come down
To bread and butter—made him a man. Those dreams
Might be all right for girls at boarding school.
Boss said, 'He'll make his mark'—then you come in.
You with your boughten hair and wheedling voice,
And pull him down again—to filth and sin.
He brings home books that say there is no God.
And dirty swine truck made up into rime
About lewd women—Faustine—some such name—
And yours to cap it on the title page.
I knew then what you were. Then came a time
I saw him sneaking off and writing stuff.
Him writing rimes and verses at his age—
Me slaving my old fingers to the bone
To keep things neat and straight and tidy like!
That was enough. Now time's come, I must strike
And save the poor fool if it's not too late—
I'd give my soul up, now, to keep him straight,
God knows I would—I guess I've done it too.
There ain't no pity in my heart for you—
There ain't— God! Who's that coming?" Down the hall
Sounded a heavy tread and at the door
The shuffling of brisk feet. The knob was shaken,
A bell rang sharply. Mary Siefert's face
Grew leaden. Her mouth twitched. She tried to speak—

Her brain was palsied—"O God! Where's a place
That I can hide? Lordy, they'll hang me sure!"
The faint voice answered from the inner room,
"I think that's Bill—get back—the closet door—
I—" Mary Siefert fled without a word.

A key turned in the lock. The man came in
Laughing. "Say, Fan—Fan, come out here and look—
A regular storm of papers in the air.
They're blowing down on everybody's heads—
Come here to the window, quick! . . . Where are you, Kid?
What's wrong?" There came a moan, and with one bound
He leaped to the inner room, and clasped her round
Her bleeding body and her weary head.
"Kid, Kid!" "Get help, Bill boy—I shot myself!"
He kissed her on the forehead, darted out
Down the long corridor toward the street,
Then Mary Siefert—white—with faltering feet
Slunk after him, and scuttled down the stair. . . .

"Oh, Kid! What made you do it?" He smoothed her hair
And stroked her brow with cold, white, trembling hands.
She did not answer that, but whispered, "Dear—

Lean closer, boy—I did not want to die—
But time might mar—even love like ours, I fear—
And, Bill—it has been one jim-dandy year."
And then, "You must go on, boy—boy—good-
by—
You'll have our book left—to remember by. . . ."

A TURN OF TWINE

I

A SUDDEN clatter rose behind the boy
Who sat there idly squatting in the sun
On the warm curb, wishing the long day done,
So noisy Monday might brawl out once more
Its rough sincerity—its hearty roar,
And put those mincing, starchy, sugared faces,
Those squeaky patent leathers and cheap stiff laces
Of girls and men back in their proper places—
Let things be real for six long days again,
And all the fellows talk and spit like men:
The boys on this new street were clean and good.
It was a very godly neighborhood,
And Reginald E. Walker, twelve years old,
Was its black sheep: he had not been enrolled
In any Sunday School; he loathed not sin;
He was the local Huckleberry Finn;
His folks were poor, but never spoiled his fun
Sunday or weekday—Turn Cap, Run Sheep Run,
Two Knockers, Duck on Davy: when he took
His turn at bat the fielder'd always look
For a home run, or maybe a lost ball.
But he was queer—at that. His mother'd call,

"Reggie, come home!" and the boy would flush
with shame,
Haled to his supper by that sissy name.
His second name was Everard, and so
He got the fellows there to call him Joe.

II

On the rough curb before his house Joe sat
Mournfully whistling to the silent street:
He scarcely heard the old man's burdened feet
Scrape on toward him, till behind his back
A rotten string snapped like a pistol crack,
And all the bundles clattered to the ground.
The boy leaped up, and saw there, strewn around,
Some six or eight square parcels—and an old
Queer sharp-eyed man struggling to keep his hold
On one large bulging thing, wrapped tightly up—
A big jar painted like a china cup
With little men on bridges done in blue.
The paper cover had split—the jar crept through
Like a great tropic snake's head oozing out
Of its old skin, and would have smashed, no doubt,
Had not the boy run up and steadied it.
They set it down together. "Have you a bit
Of twine upon your person?" the old man asked
When he had straightened up his back at last
And looked about him. "In the house, I guess
There is some string." "You live in that house?"
"Yes."

"Well, get me some—or get your mother to—
The strongest that you have—old rope would do
If you've got nothing else." Joe started in.
This man's voice had a tone that seemed to win
The lad's rude heart at once—his clothes were old
And had no Sabbath spruceness—not one fold
Laid this or that way just for folk to see
How cheap a man's time is. He seemed to be
Different—more real—more like a natural thing:
More— "Sonny! Hurry, will you—get that string!"

III

They talked together as they tied things up,
But when at last the packages were made
Found one square piece left out, that had been laid
Against the fire plug when the work began.
"Confound it—how'd that happen?" The old man
Looked at the thing a minute and then said,
"Say, son—here's an old picture, I'm afraid
I'll have to leave with you—I've only got
Two hands and it has grown confounded hot;
You'll keep it for me—ha? No, that's not fair.
Hang the thing by your bed and leave it there—
I'll never want it. You live in this place?
Those curtains in your windows?" "Them of lace?"
"Yes." "Sure—them's mom's." "You'll have a whatnot too?
With sea shells on it and maybe a few

Bisque figures standing round?" "You bet, sir, and
We got a brass lamp on a onyx stand—
Say! How do you know what's in my house?"
"Maybe
I'm a mind reader—or more like—I see
The whole place through the window—ha?"
"Not you,
The shades are down, sir.—Tell me how you knew!"
"No—all I say is hang this picture by
Your bed—God knows you need it more than I."

IV

"Sure he gave you this?" "Oh—sure!" With care
They took the paper off and, in a rim
Of cracked gilt saw a canvas old and dim,
That looked at first as if it were all black.
The mother scrubbed it off and then stood back,
Holding the soapy brush still in her hand—
"Did he call that a picture? Oh, Good Land!
No wonder that he gave this thing away.
What would they call it—Night in Egypt, hey?
Don't leave the dab down here—we've got enough
Good pictures, without this old gloomy stuff!"
The boy stood looking for a while—then said,
"I guess I'll hang the thing up by my bed;
It ain't much good—I see that—but the frame

Will kind of liven things up." "It's a shame
Wasting gilt on that old black smear." "But, mother,
Come here—now look—there's a tree—there's another—
Just like it was along about half dark—
And there's a chain fence, like at Lincoln Park,
And two big fence posts, and a gate between—
Don't you see, mother?" "No." "Look here—that green
Right by the gate post." "I see something there,
But law, I ain't got time to set and stare
All day long at that black thing. There's a slew
Good pictures here a'ready Hartel threw
In with the house—all hanging on the walls:
There's Pharaoh's Horses and Niagara Falls,
All clear and sharp and colored up—and we
Got those big crayons of your pa and me
On bamboo easels, by the parlor door.
Get off now—don't you pester me no more
(Pretty soon pa'll come in and bawl for dinner)
For getting trash in here, you are a winner."

v

Father came up and looked it over too.
He stood and studied it a good long while:
"Chuck it!" he said. "The thing is rotten vile—
D'your mother say you could keep it? Hah? All right—

I'm too wore out to get in any fight
'Bout an old picture—she says keep it—do it.
And do you know—I kind o' cotton to it—
Dog'd if I don't now . . . Go turn up the light!
Well, sure—why, sure, that's something like, all right:
It's shiny on the face—I couldn't see . . .
There's an old house—ha?—and a kinda tree:
There's a light in a door—ha? and a path up to it.
It's a night picture—ha? Who you s'pose drew it?"

VI

The weeks and months went by, and on the wall
That picture gathered dust; and all save one
Forgot it; but the boy, when play was done,
Would sometimes sit there pondering silently,
And through the twilight, strain his eyes to see
Some hint of meaning in that calling square
Of light, that from one far off window there
Peered out across the trembling evening air—
A calm, mild, challenging eye. Sometimes he caught
Quick glimpses of faint stars, and even thought
One night, he saw a tree wave to and fro,
And watched that window candle fade and glow
As if a breeze across its flame were blown—
Perhaps from human lips, that waited there alone. . . .

VII

Meanwhile, in his dumb soul began to grow
A wearying loneliness, that like a fever
Burned in him, till he grew more wild than ever
And led the neighboring boys to desperate deeds:
They once had played Wild West among the weeds
Of Bradley's vacant lot. It seemed brave game,
But somehow now, boy's play grew flat and tame:
Digging dirt caves for brigands on the hill
Palled for the lack of purses; and the thrill
Of cruises on old pirate cherry trees
Failed him at last, when, in a spanking breeze
The fore topgallant stunsail snapped its yard,
And sent Cap. Blackbeard Walker, scraped and
scarred,
Down from the mast head—technically drowned
On that hard pirate ocean called the ground.

VIII

One neighbor said that hitting on his forehead
Made him so strange and moody—as he grew—
And then his mother told a thing she knew:
That coming one night quickly up the stair
She found him sitting with his cane-seat chair
Pulled up, by that black picture on the wall:
That he had not even heard her first sharp call,
But sat there bug-eyed, gazing. "What you see?"
She'd cried—half scared. Then the boy suddenly

Whisked round, and tried to smile and seem all
right.
"You want to keep the gas going all night?
Come down and sit— What's wrong?" she'd
cried. "You'd think
That old black picture was his meat and drink:
He'd sit there yapping at it hours together."
The neighbor touched her head. "I wonder
whether
Your boy—?" "My boy? He's right as your old
hat.
It's that old picture I'm a-hitting at.
It's animal mezmerism's what I say.
Here was my boy—just crazy like to play—
And chasing all the time—always in trouble—
Always a-busting glass—he's cost us double
What any boy around these parts has cost.
No wonder we're so poor, I says—we lost
Enough a-puttin' windows in, to buy
A decent place—us living in this sty—
Me wearing my young life out— 'Z I was saying—
Here he was always raring round, and playing—
But all a sudden stops hard off, and gets
Just shut up like a spicket—just goes and sets
Up in that room. . . . Paw! Take him to work
with you!
I'm getting notes from school that he don't do
No lessons proper. Let him get a taste
Of real work. You ain't had no time to waste

Loafing like he does, all your life. He's learning
That he can sponge a living without him earning."
"I always paid my keep," the father said.
"He's got some blame fool notions in his head."—
"You'd worry if you'd seen some things he does."
"Maybe you're right—he ain't the boy he was."
Mother went on, "Take him tomorrow morning.
I'll burn up that old splotch, just for a warning.
He'd keep that gas jet burning there all night:
Why don't he come down, if he wants a light?"

IX

"I'll burn the old splotch."—Up there in his room
The boy sat listening to the talk below.
Burn up the picture? . . . They could never know
What magic that old daub had worked in him;
What hand had somehow pointed out the dim
Stars in his dawning soul, ere life's hot sun
Could blot them out forever—every one.
They could not know, that in his kindling heart
That fellowship of human dreams called art
Had been forever sealed. His mother said,
"Put out that gas! Come down, or go to bed!"
He heard the thumping of her rocking chair
On the loose parlor boards. . . . The cool spring air
Swept over his warm cheek. Then turning out
The gas, he stood there silent, much in doubt
What he might do to save this precious thing. . . .

X

Downstairs the voices still were murmuring,
And the clean night air could not blow away
Out of the house the odors of the day—
The kitchen smells still mounting, and the must
In his worn mattress, and the stifling dust
That lay about the old room everywhere.
The boy looked toward his picture: some chance glare
Of a far street light played across its face.
All else lay dark about him. He could trace
In that dim glow, the path, the gate, the trees
That seemed once more half waving, as the breeze
Freshened upon his face, and he could see
That painted window, with its lambent gleams,
That called—with all the eloquence of dreams—
"Dog'd if it ain't pretty," he thought, "tonight.
It never showed up that way by gas light."
The wind had softly shut the boy's room door
And blown his ragged bedquilt to the floor.
He felt it soft beneath his feet and knew
That it was there. How briskly the wind blew,
And how it swept the must and mold away!
It seemed the very meadow-breath of May,—
As though night bade Earth's amorous parleys pass—
With even the cool dew's commerce in the grass,
And all the fragrant prattlings of young flowers,
To scent the old town's chimney pots and towers.

XI

The perfume rose about him, and swept over
His face, as if the meadow mint and clover
Were tossing, on the carpet at his feet.
He had not ever smelled a wind so sweet.
He tingled with deep breathings. "Jiminy
Crickets," he cried, "this air tastes good to me!"
He could not ever have enough.—But then
His eyes strayed back along the wall again:
Even brighter now, the pictured window shone,
As if it had a candle of its own,
For the far street lamp's glimmer seemed to hit
The very lighted inner square of it.
The boy's heart quickened: softly he stepped around
And stood before the picture. Not one sound
His feet made on the floor—the quilt lay there
Muffling the sound like grass. The cool spring air
Played round him—through the window in his room.
Before him that lone light across the gloom
Called him and called and called—so far—so fair.
It seemed too bright. He held his hand up where
The street light seemed to fall—no light fell there.
His arm reached out—reached out—out—far too far. . . .
"Judas Priest!" cried the boy.
A great pale star
Twinkled in the deep sky. The looming trees

Tossed their dark heads, and as the meadow breeze
Freshened upon his face, he heard the hiss
And rustle of green branches; far and high,
The little window like a patient eye
Called him once more. . . . A pebble piercing through
The flapping, paper sole of his worn shoe
Made the boy limp a little. He pressed the bars
Of that old gate. . . . Night with its million stars
Leaned over him. That window light his guide,
He pressed those cold bars back, and stepped inside.

OUTCASTS IN BEULAH LAND

I

'Twas half-past one, the sixth of February,
As time would run on earth, when they came in:
Blind Nab the beggar, James Hall and Fish House Mary—
A most ill-sorted lot. Some common sin
Had bound their fates together. They stood uncertain
Within the gate—Death drew his rattling curtain.

Then Blind Nab started pattering up the runway
And yelling, "Now I'm dead I won't be blind!"
Next Hall the millionaire, possessed and portly;
Poor bawdy Mary lurching on behind:
Nab groped ahead, Hall stared about, but she
Just craned her wrinkled face on, hungrily.

The curtain closed. "What's that?" asked Nab.
"Where are we?"
"In Hell, I think," drawled James, with half a smile.
"You lie," Nab roared, "I'm blind still! Let 'em char me
And welcome—sling on coals, but all the while

Give sight of it—red flames, high walls, deep spaces,
And wicked women with their painted faces."

As he went ranting on—the bent old woman
Edged up and touched his hand and called his name.
"Thank God," Nab cried, "here's some one else that's human!"
"Lord help us, though—Old Moll?" "Yes, boy—the same.
You know me, lad?" "Know you—too blasted well!
If you're here, Moll, by cripes, this must be Hell!"

He muttered on then down the dismal road
And with his smutty language smeared the air;
Close at his heels, enthralled though shocked, still strode
Jim Hall the connoisseur and millionaire,
Wondering idly who would buy his Titians
While he and these two shared the same perditions. . . .

There is a barren meadow in this land—
A gaunt plain, little known to Revelation,
On whose bleak stones Death's awestruck thousands stand
Uneasily awaiting God's damnation:

Until, when many days still find them so,
Their consciences recover and off they go.

Here came our three and joined the restless crowd
That stood debating what the place could be:
Some partisans said Hell, some stood for Heaven:
But all deplored the want of scenery:
And one old chap, killed in his motor car
Offered his sealskins for a mild cigar.

A few there were both shocked and reverent,
But on the whole the mortals still seemed mortal:
The same old human passions still unbent:
Pride in Death's presence—pride beyond Death's portal:
The minute's difference small change had made:
The bold were calm—the timid wept and prayed.

Yet all agreed, with no dissenting voices,
The crowd was most unfeelingly selected:
Sluts, bawds and ladies, gentlemen and poets
Scraped elbows or drew back from rags infected:
But stranger still, bootblacks and bards seemed poor,
And the young trollops there, could still allure.

Nothing was up to common expectation:
The pious found no harps and felt no crowns;
The low grew restive for their exaltation,
And ragged wenches wept for satin gowns:

Parsons and bishops walked aside and waited:
The idle rich were idle—if unfêted.

Some, of a curious turn, took time to wonder
Where lay the Throne, where walked the early dead:
"At least we shall see Washington and Cromwell,
That's something to be thankful for," they said.
"How about Cæsar?" "Who—the ancient Greek?"
"Let Cæsar go—it's Pompadour I'll seek!"

"Phryne!", "Lais!", "Jane Shore!" and "Cleopatra!"
"That little blue-eyed piece at Eighth and Race!",
"George Borrow!", "Robert Browning!", "Jim my husband!",
"Martha!", "Babbette!",—each hungered for one face:
Love, fear, ambition, friendship, hate, and lust,
Still strong with life's bread eaten save one crust.

So they fell wrangling, in the midst of which,
As Mary, Hall, and Nab came up and listened,
A fair-haired lad without a single stitch
Ran toward them through the mist: slim bare legs glistened
On dancing feet of splendor, as the boy
Leaped onward like the bodied breath of joy.

An old crone cried—"That's Nickie—that's the Devil!
He's here to baste the souls of us poor dead!
Apollyon, blast his heart! He's come to tempt us!"
Proud women, soldiers, bishops, turned and fled:
So, in one moment, in that cheerless place,
Three sinners met their Maker—face to face.

Footfalls were human faces to old Nabbie:
Nothing in this boy's footing bade him run.
Besides, Blind Nab was looking for the Devil—
He knew that fire was light like moon and sun.
"You can't scare me with heat," Nab used to say:
"I've wished for Hell fire many a winter's day."

Jim Hall had spent a mint of yellow money
Learning to love things beautiful and fine:
And riches in his hands now yielding honey
For this last comb: he knew the thing divine.
He had too often priced Art's inner truth
Not to know Beauty's soul there fleshed in youth.

Mary, who'd made her living out of men,
Was not so learned in all the rules of Art,
But she had lived eyes-open and knew when
The face spoke love and love was in the heart.
Now in this lad's gay face the touch was true:
She waited—as her habit bade her do.

"Why, what a pack of cowards men must be!"
The Boy cried, smiling like a summer moon.
Then one by one he scanned the silent three,
Afterwards sighed, "Perhaps I've come too soon:
I have been sleeping since your world began:
Somehow I had a different dream of man."

"What's in your eyes, sir?" Nabbie answered,
"Nothing—
A little gift from Dad—so I've been told;
He had run round in town a lot that winter,
And it showed up when I was two weeks old:
But that ain't your care, as I read the Book.
Bring on the Hell fire—let me have a look!"

The Boy frowned, "Tell me, man, what stopped your life then?
Were you so old that you were ripe to die?"
"Good God, sir,—I've been hung!" "Hung?"
"Cramped for murder.
I mind you'll show me flames—when blind men die
They've got to lean a lot on simple feeling.
I sense you're straight, and, sir, I won't be squealing:

"Go ahead—go the limit! Give me eyes first,
Then if you like I'll roar the roof off Hell."

"Murder, you said?" "Yes—murder. Here's the
way of it—
But lord sir, it ain't nothing much to tell:
The facts is—I was drunk and deviled sorely,
And when I'm drunk I hold my temper porely.

"There was a gang of kids that used to guide me
Down them steep stairs by Kelly Jones' saloon.
There was some Saint's school near that had a
recess—
I timed by that to hit down town at noon,
So I could do my lay along the streets
And touch the lunch room crowds for coin and eats.

"One little girl there had a voice I took to.
She couldn't have been twelve—no—not so old,
But when I came that way, 'twas her I'd look to
To guide me to the rail. 'Twas her I'd hold
And pat her hair—I mind she said 'twas brown.
'Well—good luck, Nab!' she'd call as I went down.

"And you may not believe how much that perked
me
Standing on crossways, when the feet scraped by;
For when the streets were wet and folks were
stingy,
A-thinking of her hair I'd fetch a sigh—
Woolgathering what kind of feel was 'Brown'
Or how she'd sing, 'Good luck!' as I went down.

" Then sometimes in my cup—I little thinking,
A passerby would drop a dime or quarter.
' Cheer up ! ' he'd say—I all the time high-hearted.
You may believe I wished she was my daughter.
I reckon if I'd had her standing there,
I could a made my trip to Frisco Fair.

" One day I took too many when I started,
And got all balled up and come late along.
' There's old Dick Dead Eye waitin' for you, Carrie,'
Sings out a boy that stood there in the throng.
I didn't like that way of talking to her.
I guess I cussed him out—I'm no ways sure.

" But up the bastid came and knocked my cup down
And kicked it clattering against the house.
' Wait till I get my hands on you,' I tells him.
He calls, ' You dirty bum—you gutter louse ! '
I took my stick at that and laid around
Yerking to get a crack at that young hound.

" In course I missed him, but the second blow—
I sent that singing down—it landed too,
Heavy and dull.—Then, sir, I sickened over.
To smash a child is not for men to do :
Then came the voice again, shrill in a shout,
' You bum, that's Carrie, and you've laid her out.'

"Then there was calls and windows rattling up,
Me groping round to find her, where she lay;
A woman's shriek, a touch of wavy hair,—
Then double night and death, and judgment day.
It may have been three months before I hung,
But I was dead, sir, when that cane was swung.

"So you may think—I'm ready for the music.
Go ahead—stoke her up! I've got a promise.
I got an old sky pilot's word to clinch it:
'Eyes? Sure you'll have eyes there, you doubtin'
Thomas!'
I've waited long enough. I've made my bed.
Eyes and a chance at Dad! Then go ahead!"

The Boy looked down on that tense, puckered brow:
His face seemed the more tragic of the two.
Suppose in play a father maimed his children,
The Boy's face looked as such a man's might do.
And when he spoke the words were faint and few:
"Oh, Nabbie lad, we have no eyes for you."

Nab stood a minute with scared, sullen face,
And then a swift smile chased the scowl away:
"'S all right, old chap, you've done your duty,
likely—
You've said the thing you're planted here to say:
I judge you're doing your bit same as me—
Telling dead blind men that they'll never see.

"Sound 's though you mean well, and I guess you
do:
They's good ones here in Hell—I'll go on that.
Maybe I'll cross the river—or I won't,
That's as may be, sir, but I'll tell you flat:
I'll have a pair of eyes as good as yours
Once I get round behind them golden doors—

"Or once the old Nick sets his hooks in me.
I ask you now—what pleasure would God get
Watching Hell burn a chap as couldn't see
The spit preparing? Mary, old cow, I'll bet
You beat me to it—so long!" Off he strode
Tapping his blind way down an endless road. . . .

II

They had gone on a long way from that place:
The Boy and Mary Curtis and Jim Hall,
And Jim had looked on Titian face to face,
And had made clear, that on his gallery wall
There was a famous lady—chaste and sainted—
Whom Titian had forgot he ever painted.

But he, the Boy, and Hall, for many an hour
Had held high talk of color, beauty, art,
Until poor Mary's weary whines had forced them
To break the spell before they wished to part.
"There is some one I must see here," she said,
"For I too have my friends among the dead."

So on they went, down a long lane of faces;
  Of staring men who seemed so weary all,
The Boy and Mary walked with dread and wonder:
  The faces didn't bother old Jim Hall,
Who prattled smoothly on, in cultured phrases,
Of—Luca della Robbia's stannous glazes,

Of Anatolian prayer rugs' ruby hues,
  Of Chippendale, of Louis Quinze and Seize,
Of Seije's lustrous greens and Ta Ch'ing blues
  Of ivories and jades and tapestries:
So hobby ridden that he couldn't see
In those worn faces—art or tragedy.

As they went on, a fellow in the crowd
  Stepped out. The Boy looked at his face and
    cried,
"Who are you? What woes make men look like
    this?"
  "Toil's gray days long endured," the man replied.
"And after—Death's gray days spent standing here.
Dreaming gray dreams of girls and bitter beer.

"For, to forget that we was ever born,
  Or born, for to forget we ever died,—
When we was living we was ground and worn:
  Our bodies and the fellows deep inside.
And, sir, we sweat all day, from six to six—
Then dies, and wakes in this here clammy fix!

"Where's God? We done square—let Him by uncussed:
We said—'All right, you swells—enjoy your laughter!
We got our rags, our suds, our whores, our crust,
And our sweat now, but wait— Oh, boys! Hereafter—
We shines for winners—hereafter! Take your price!'
And so we thought and took it—pangs and lice.

"And we got stung as always. You're a swell,
You too—the woman ain't—she's got the eye.
She's took her fling, she has. Trust me to tell—
The wrinkles underneath 'em never lie.
But you're the swells," the man turned to the crowd,
"Where's justice, eh? Where's God? He's too damn proud—

"He'll never look on faces mean as ours.
Why don't He give us justice here? We're not
Fools—you may think so, but there's in my head
As good a pair of brains as yours. You got
Time to fill up in—time to get brain drunk
Like my mill owner had—the dirty skunk!"

"He had the time;—filled houses up with truck
And paid his millions out to a museum;

But us that bought his paintings in our muck
  Was nailed from six to six and couldn't see 'em;
Now we stand eating our dumb hearts in Hell,
While he sets up and banquets like a swell."

"That is most int'resting!" said old James Hall,
  "I may have known your owner—who was he?"
"My owner? There you're right, sir, blast your
    eyes!
  His name was Hall—Jim Hall, sir." "Why, dear
    me!
Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed the connoisseur,
"I had no notion that my men were poor!"

"My men?—Good Saints! Boys, rally—it's the
    boss!
  Give him a taste of Hell now, while he's here!"
There was a shout, a rush—grim starveling faces,
  Old Jim, bewildered, but too proud for fear:
Then the crowd closed and parted—that was all.
And there was no one left to name, Jim Hall—

Only a dawning smile on men's dull faces,
  The wrinkling brows that showed new stirs of
    mind,
New words to murmur, unaccustomed graces,
  A little light of hope, where hope was blind;
So of that leavening of taste and art
Each shared his increment—a thousandth part.

III

In Mary's eyes tears came. "He was a good man
And he did better than the most. Do you
Call wiping him out Justice—you in Heaven?
He played the game fair—did the best he knew
To make our dirty world a pretty place.
He sacrificed his workers for his race.

"I've been in his museums, and I'll tell you
I came out with new heart for my life's work.
'Here's stuff,' I said, 'good stuff that men have sweat on:
I've got a task too—where's my call to shirk:
I ain't no good painting, or statue making,
But here's a grown-up job I'm undertaking.'

"Then I went on and put it through. I reckon
Old Jim Hall's pictures turned the tide that day;
You'll maybe think I didn't go straight, at it,
But my mind's clear on that, for all men say.
I don't know what I am, or what's my place—
All I want here is just one human face.

"It's out of them I'll get my work's reward—
It's likely God'll curse me for my trade,
But there'll be greeting in two people's hearts
Will ease me—wheresomever my torment's laid;
And men may call me dirty, ugly, lewd,
And God may fail, but not their gratitude.

" It's them I'm looking for—I'll find 'em soon.
Oh, it's a long day, John, since I lost you!
He said, sir, ' Take my kid and bring her up!
Make her a lady.'—' John boy, that I'll do!
I'll work my hands to the bone for her,' I said.
He smiled and blessed me—in an hour was dead.

" He was a gentleman, John was—no scum
Like I am, so we never did get married.
He had to think of June, his little daughter—
Kept at some school until his plans miscarried.
Then they both settled down to live with me;
Those were my best days. I worked hard to be

" Worthy of all the love and trust he had.
When he got poorly I took sewing in:
It would a moved your heart to hear him sit
Contending Sunday sewing was a sin—
And all the time she wanting clothes and he
Needing good food and cheering company.

" Then, when John died, I thought, when first grief passed,
We'll drag on somehow—little June and I—
But soon I saw, how in my poor bare room
With the rough neighbors round she'd droop and sigh—
The funeral cleaned out my little hoard—
And coarse plain food was our best table board.

"One Sunday we went out to Jim Hall's pictures;
My little girl in her clean muslin dress,
Her pale cheeks flushed to see the real oil paintings,—
Asking hard questions while I'd blindly guess:
'That scene's in It'ly. Those men in big collars?
They're Spaniards. That one's worth a hundred dollars;

"'Those numbers are the price.' So we went on
To the hall's end: there in an open place
The statue of a girl. 'Some fellow's worked
A half a lifetime on that marble face,'
I thought. Two men came in—we moved away,
But I remember that figure to this day.

"Here's what came to me, 'Whoever made that thing
Must have sweat blood for the stone woman there.
'I got a live child and a dead man's love
To work on here. That's my job. I can't spare
A chance to put my work through in good style,
For little June there, with her fading smile.'

"I took her home, fixed up my clothes, and then
Next night went out to town alone. . . . So, soon
We moved to better rooms. I hired a servant
And there were books and toys for little June.

She went to boarding school, made friends, but after
Each Christmas came and filled my place with laughter.

"I sent my friends off—kept that week for her
Each year. Yet when she came and looked at me
I grew afraid of her keen laughing eyes,—
Yet God knows I had little cause to be:
I did not think that I could stain with sin
While I had her clean heart to wash mine in.

"Well—when June married I sent a string of pearls,
And had a note—the first with her new name,
Full of her gratitude and happiness.
I heard no more then, till a wire came:
'In town between trains—four this afternoon.
Come down to lunch with us—as ever, June.'

"Out through the gates came June, all gay to greet me:
'Why, child, you're changed!' 'Child? I'm two-thirds as old
As you are. Meet my husband—Mary—Edward.'
He looked at me—then flushed. My heart turned cold.
I tried to smile—his eyes avoided me.
Our lunch was a two-hour tragedy.

" Just three days after, in my morning mail
A little package—her pearl necklace, came.
Then after many months a paper clipping,
Two columns marked—a death and birth,—her name,
The little fellow's name she'd left behind.
Later—somehow—I heard the child was blind.

" That was all twenty years ago and more;
I've had a sight of days to blunder through,
And sin has stained my body brown as mud.
' John boy,' I've said, ' I'm mucked in sin for you.
I put shame's garment on for you and wore it.
But, boy, your love will pay my old heart for it.

" ' I'll get no show in Heaven—let June be there.
I've kept her clean for you and God. I grew
Foul in the doing of it. My part is Hell,
But, John boy, we'll sit there together, we two.
Make her a lady! '—That meant just one thing.
I brought to do it, all I had to bring."

The Boy's step dragged. He could not face her eyes.
The splendor and the laughter of His feet
Were sighed away forever. He looked around:
A thousand hungry eyes glared up to greet
His fevered gaze—gloom, solitude, despair,
Regret, vain hope, but no smiles anywhere.

Then Mary gave a sudden start. "Look! Look!
I see him! John! Praise God, at last! Oh, honey,
You're waiting round—for me!" A young man near her
Turned in surprise. "Keep back there! Don't get funny,
Old sport!" "But, John, I'm Mary—when you died
You said, 'Make June a lady.' God knows I tried!

"She was a lady too, John. Now I've passed;
So we've got all the rest of time to spend
Forgetting these long years—that closed at last:
It was worth all to meet you at the end."
She reached her arms out and the pent tears came
To her old eyes as she breathed out his name.

On the man's brow one little bead of sweat
Caught light a moment; then a voice cried out,
"There's Dandy John's old woman come for him!"
Down the long listening lanes a general shout
Of laughter rippled like a slow sea wave
Slanting along the shore. The young man gave

One stifled, unbelieving, pain-wrung cry;
And then in spite of all men's merriment
Leaned down and kissed her on her haggard eyes. . . .
The flush of youth ran out of him. He sent

One wild glance up to the gray sky. There fell
A sudden silence in the halls of Hell.

Arm linked to arm forever, they stood, and we
  Sinners who watched, envied not Him, who planned
This thing called Life, and, waking, saw at last
  The justice and the joy of Beulah Land;
For as He turned and toiled along His way,
His face was wrinkled and His hair seemed gray.

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